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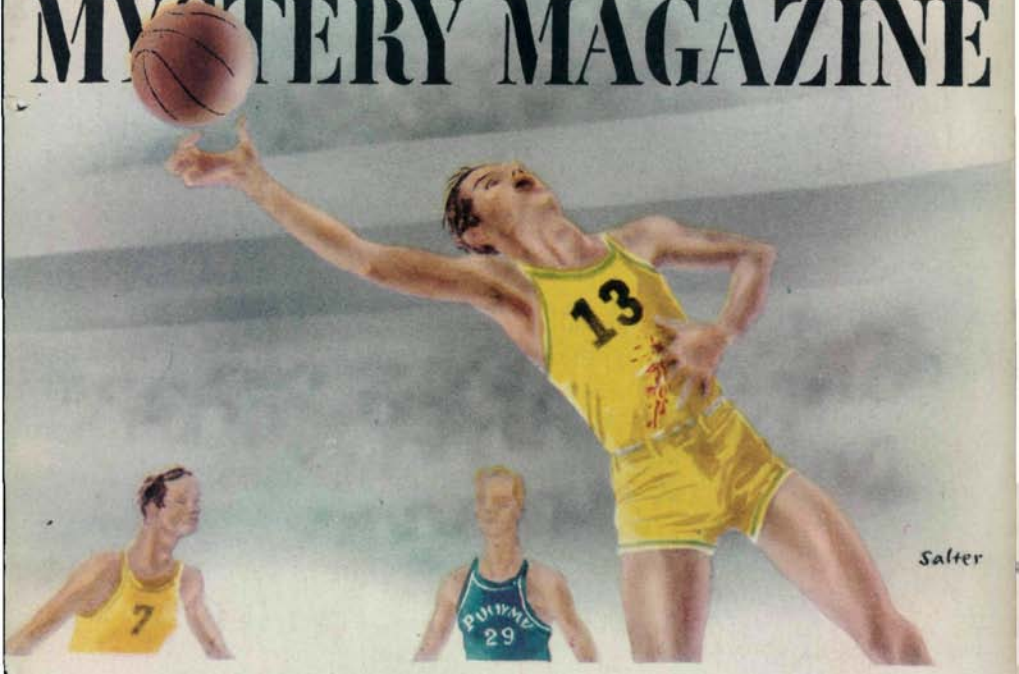

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, *Publisher* • ELLERY QUEEN, *Editor*

570 LEXINGTON AVENUE, NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

★★★★ STORY

PALE BLUE NIGHTGOWN — *Louis Golding* — 3

DETECTIVE STORIES

Professor Poggioli in
A DAYLIGHT ADVENTURE — *T. S. Stribling* — 22

Uncle Abner in
A TWILIGHT ADVENTURE — *Melville Davisson Post* — 35

Sam Cragg in
1000-TO-1 FOR YOUR MONEY — *Frank Gruber* — 44

Dona Malfada in
THE DWARFS' CLUB — *Francisco A. Branco* — 65

Lord Peter Wimsey in
THE NECKLACE OF PEARLS — *Dorothy L. Sayers* — 123

CRIME STORIES

BLACKMAIL — *Stephen McKenna* — 10

THE HUMMING BIRD COMES HOME — *Cornell Woolrich* — 81

NOT FOR A CHORUS GIRL — *C. S. Montanye* — 113

THE GOLDEN DOZEN

Sherlock Holmes in
THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE — *A. Conan Doyle* — 93

SUSPENSE STORY

THE VAMPIRE — *Thomas Narcejac* — 131

SPEAKING OF CRIME

THE BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH — *Anthony Boucher* — 63

LEAVES FROM THE EDITORS' NOTEBOOK

QUEEN'S QUORUM: PART SEVEN — *Ellery Queen* — 116

PUBLISHER: *Lawrence E. Spivak* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 15, No. 76, March, 1950. Published monthly by The American Mercury, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter, Aug. 28, 1941, at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879.

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$100 Reward!

ANNOUNCEMENT OF COVER CONTEST

Last month we announced the resumption of Ellery Queen's Cover Contest, declared ourselves ready to pay a $100 reward for the best short-short story written around the murderous situation portrayed on our cover. This month the contest continues. The point was that production difficulties make it necessary for our cover art-work to be finished and in the hands of the printer before the corresponding table of contents is definitely decided upon. The intriguing result is that our covers almost always illustrate a story which does not exist — a story, in short, with a face but no body. By means of the Cover Contest we ask our readers to provide us with a story-body to go with the cover illustration.

As we said the last time, here is your golden opportunity to become a writer — golden to the tune of $100.00 in cash. All you have to do is write a short-short story — only three pages of manuscript! — about this month's cover.

For the best story submitted we will pay $100.00 — and we will print the story in a future issue of *EQMM!* Here are the simple rules:

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(1) The plot must tie in closely with this month's cover.

(2) Length must not exceed 1,000 words.

(3) Entries will be judged on aptness to the cover, ingenuity of plot, and smoothness of expression. The editorial staff of *EQMM* will serve as judges and their decision will be accepted as final; in case of ties, duplicate prizes will be awarded.

(4) Entries must be postmarked no later than March 16, 1950, and the winning story will be published in our June issue, on sale May 5, 1950.

(5) No entries will be returned.

(6) The contest is open to everybody except employees of this publishing house and their relatives.

And one last condition, which is more a request than a rule:

(7) We ask all professional writers to please refrain from submitting entries — their training and experience would give them too great an advantage. This contest is planned for amateur writers — for the detective-story fans to whom we all owe so much. Give them a chance to win!

Mail your story to:

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Louis Golding was born in Manchester, England — the "Doomington" of his best-known novels, MAGNOLIA STREET *and* MR. EMMANUEL, *although Mr. Golding himself considers* THE MIRACLE BOY *and* FIVE SILVER DAUGHTERS *his best and most enduring work. Actually, Mr. Golding covers a wide range of literary accomplishment: his writings include not only novels and many short stories, but also poetry, belles lettres, travel books, criticism, and drama; he has written directly for the reading public, and for the stage, radio, and movies. He is perhaps the greatest modern exponent of wanderlust among contemporary authors, having traveled and voyaged to all parts of the world, with special emphasis on the Mediterranean area. As he put it himself, he "has lectured in America and played ping-pong in four continents." An aficionado of many fields, Mr. Golding has a particular passion for what he calls "the linked arts of ballet and boxing."*

Further comment when you have finished reading "Pale Blue Nightgown" . . .

PALE BLUE NIGHTGOWN

by LOUIS GOLDING

MR. DOFFERTY was tall and thin and had big hands and feet. The small boys called him "Lampy," which was an abbreviation of "Lamppost." He hated the small boys calling him "Lampy," not only because he was sensitive about his appearance, but because he hated small boys. He would rather have taken the top form in a refined girls' school and would have got on very well there. He could have talked about Swinburne with the girls, and about his foreign travels. "Was there ever really a Dolores, Mr. Dofferty?" "Do the young warriors in Kashmir still go out to battle with roses behind their ears?" He would have been very happy in such a place.

But it had not worked out that way. He was getting on in years by the time he got his teacher's certificate, and he could not pick and choose. He became a pupil-teacher at a boys' school in Doomington. They were common boys. In the course of time he became headmaster.

He knew that he deserved better things. He let it be known that he had traveled about the East quite a lot in his young days; and it was true, for he had been the son of a noncommissioned officer out in India. Later, he was employed on a tea plantation in Ceylon. When that failed, he came to England to take up teaching.

He was very proud of having trav-

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eled in the East. His "sanctum," as he called it, was cluttered with eastern curios. There were prayer-wheels and fly-whisks, curtains and cushions, elephants carved in ebony, ashtrays and pen-trays of Benares ware, a Malay kris he used as a paper-knife, a soapstone Buddha he used as a paperweight. It was not very suitable furniture for a headmaster's room in a poor boys' school in Doomington, but it put people in their place. It put him in his place, too. He was a traveler, an empire-builder.

He did not feel so sure of himself when he went out into the playground. He would have preferred to stay in his sanctum, but he had a feeling that the small boys took to talking and laughing about him when they got together. He would stand for a long time, quite still, behind the windows of one of the classrooms, and then, all of a sudden, he was a few inches behind you. For a person with such large feet, he moved very quickly and quietly over the gravel.

The schoolday came to an end at half-past four. It was bad enough when the boys collected in the playintervals between lessons, but when the last lesson was over, there was absolutely no excuse for them to be hanging about, whispering, and pointing with their thumbs over their shoulders. On the day in Mr. Dofferty's history with which this tale is concerned, there was an unusually large troop of boys assembled near the wood-work room, at the bottom end of the playground. Mr. Dofferty happened to be at the top end of the playground. He observed that only one of the boys was talking, a small, pale boy named Albert Hewitt. The rest were listening. At least, they were listening in the intervals of laughing. The narrative with which Albert Hewitt was regaling them seemed to entertain them mightily, though Albert himself seemed not at all amused. On the contrary, his spotty little face seemed paler than usual; his eyes seemed to stand quite a long way out of his head.

Mr. Dofferty did not like Albert Hewitt; he thought him a soapy, sneaky sort of boy. He had had occasion more than once to take him into his sanctum and use the cane on him. What was the boy doing, holding forth at this time of day, when well-behaved boys should be making tracks for home, with their heads filled with the night's homework? What and who was there to talk about that was so frightfully funny?

Of course; Mr. Dofferty could swear to it . . . "Lampy," and once again, "Lampy." It was a long way from the bottom end to the top end of the playground, but Mr. Dofferty had extraordinarily acute hearing. "Lampy" again, and a roar of laughter. The boy was talking about his headmaster; he was making jokes about his headmaster. Mr. Dofferty's lips set thin and hard.

Mr. Dofferty made a sort of sideways movement on a segment of a wide circle towards the group of boys. He looked a bit like a huntsman keeping to windward of his quarry. The

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maneuver was successful. He had come up to within a few yards of them, always in the rear of Albert Hewitt, before the boys became aware of him. Then, suddenly, the boys caught sight of him: all but Albert Hewitt. One moment later they had scuttled away, like a warren-full of rabbits shocked into a hedge by a footstep. A hand came down heavily on Albert Hewitt's shoulder.

"You were talking about me, I think," said Mr. Dofferty. His voice was gentle.

Albert Hewitt's body quivered under the great hand. He did not dare to turn round.

"No, sir, Mr. Dofferty, I wasn't," said the small boy.

"You were referring to me by another name," pointed out Mr. Dofferty.

"No, sir, Mr. Dofferty, I wasn't," the small boy said again. His voice was hardly more than a whisper.

Mr. Dofferty removed his hand from Albert Hewitt's shoulder.

"Perhaps you'll turn round, Albert," he suggested.

Albert turned round. He did not dare to look up into Mr. Dofferty's face, cold and remote. The thin thighs of the headmaster seemed to soar into space, like trees. The playground was appallingly empty, but for himself and the soft voice that came down from so high.

"I would like you to look into my face," requested Mr. Dofferty. "Will you?"

The small boy did as he was told.

Mr. Dofferty continued. "Excellent, Albert. Now, I feel quite certain you won't lie to me. You *were* referring to me by a name which I have forbidden the school to use. Is that not so, Albert?"

"Yes, sir," whispered the small boy. His lips started quivering. He found it as difficult not to lower his eyes from Mr. Dofferty's eyes as it had been difficult a moment ago to raise them.

"Now, now." Mr. Dofferty wagged his finger almost playfully. "Don't make an exhibition of yourself. No harm will come to you, so long as you're a good boy and speak up. What was it you were saying to those boys, Albert? Come, come, Albert, what was it?"

The boy said not a word. He stared up into Mr. Dofferty's eyes, as if he had neither ears nor tongue.

"What are you staring at me like that for?" barked Mr. Dofferty. "Is there anything wrong with me?"

The boy's head sagged suddenly towards his chest.

"Well, Albert!" The headmaster's voice had become gentle as a dove's again. "Are you going to tell me what it was you were saying about me?"

"I wasn't saying nothing," Albert said. His lower lip projected a little.

"Obstinate, eh?" said Mr. Dofferty, quite gaily now. "You know, Albert," he almost wheedled, "it will be a lot better for you if you tell me what you were saying."

"I wasn't saying nothing," Albert repeated.

"I see," Mr. Dofferty said shortly.

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He raised his eyes to roof-level and joined his hands behind his back. He seemed to be communing with himself. Then he spoke again. His tone was very matter-of-fact. "If you go on disobeying me, I'll take you into the sanctum and thrash you. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," the boy mumbled.

"Very well, then. Are you going to tell me what you were saying?"

"No, sir."

"I'll take you into the sanctum and thrash you within an inch of your life. Are you going to tell me?" Again silence. "Are you going to tell me?" Mr. Dofferty reached down and got his fingers round the boy's arm.

With a quick involuntary gesture the boy wrenched his arm free.

"It was only a dream!" he cried. "Let me go home!"

"Oh, it was only a dream?" said Mr. Dofferty, easily. "Why didn't you say so before, you silly boy?" His heart felt curiously lighter. He took his watch out of his waistcoat pocket. "You're right!" he exclaimed. "It's time we were both going home!"

"Oh, thank you, thank you very much, sir!" cried Albert. "Good afternoon, Mr. Dofferty." The boy was already scampering off.

"Oh, by the way!" the headmaster called after him.

The boy turned. "Yes, sir?" he asked fearfully.

Mr. Dofferty did not say anything for a moment or two. He realized, in fact, he had nothing to say. He was merely aware that he did not like the boy going off like that, as if he had not used the forbidden nickname, as if he were innocent as the shorn lamb. Then he found his lips uttering a question concerning which his mind had no curiosity at all. For, after all, what interest was it to Mr. Dofferty, headmaster, Mr. Dofferty, world-traveler, what dream a snivelling, little elementary schoolboy might dream?

"What did you dream about, Albert?"

The boy's jaw fell. The faint flush of color that had come up into his face went out completely.

"Nothing," he muttered.

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Dofferty. "You were dreaming about me, weren't you?"

Then, suddenly, Mr. Dofferty remembered how amused all the small boys had been while Albert Hewitt had been holding forth. He had been telling them his dream, of course, a dream about their headmaster. Mr. Dofferty blushed. It was in the last degree undignified for a person in his position to insist on ferreting out a small boy's dream, whatever the dream was about. But he could not bear the way the boy was lying to him. If the boy would only own up simply and honestly, they could go home, both of them.

"Well, are you going to say something?" asked Mr. Dofferty.

The boy was as silent as a lump of wood.

Mr. Dofferty, suddenly, lost patience. "Very well, then. You will please come along with me."

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He strode forward towards the big door in the middle of the building. The boy hesitated for one moment. He looked round wildly. It was impossible to get away from those long legs.

The sanctum was a room on the right-hand side of the main corridor. Mr. Dofferty took out his bunch of keys and unlocked the door.

"This way," he said frigidly.

The boy followed. He knew the way well enough. There was a faint smell in the air which turned his stomach, as it had been turned once or twice before. Mr. Dofferty burned joss-sticks, now and again, when his nostalgia for the East got him badly.

The headmaster went over to the table in the middle of the room and carefully removed two or three of his oriental knick-knacks — the soapstone Buddha he used as a paperweight, the ivory-handled Malay kris he used as a paper-knife, the heavy, brass, Chinese seal. He sat down in the space thus cleared and reached casually along the table for his cane.

"Stand here," he ordered the boy. The boy came and stood beside him. "What was your dream about?"

The boy stood obdurate.

"You're not going to tell me?" Mr. Dofferty roared. "So, you're not going to tell me?" He lifted the cane high in air, ready to strike.

"I'll tell you!" the boy shouted suddenly. "Please, sir, I'll tell you!"

Mr. Dofferty's face was as white as a tablecloth, his lips were almost as white. "Very well, then! Go on!"

"I — I — dreamed —" the boy whimpered — "I — I dreamed — that I ——" Then he looked up beseechingly. "I *can't* tell you, sir!" he wailed.

"I think you can," said the other.

The boy swallowed hard. "I dreamed in my dream, sir, you was wearing — you was wearing ——"

"Go on!"

"You was wearing a long nightgown, sir. It was a silk one, sir, pale blue silk. And — and ——" Again the words stuck in the boy's throat.

Mr. Dofferty was not aware of the boy's discomfort. He was aware only of his own. He knew he had never felt so ridiculous in all his life before.

"Go on!" he said thickly. "Anything more?"

"Yes, sir!" blubbered the boy. "You was wearing a wreath of daisies round your head!"

"I see," whispered Mr. Dofferty.

But he did not mean that he himself saw. He meant that the small boys saw, the small boys who had laughed uproariously when Albert had told them his dream. He saw with their eyes his own unspeakable grotesqueness — pale blue nightgown and wreath of daisies.

Why didn't the small boy get to hell out of it? What was the blob of dirt hanging about for? He must take himself in hand. He must not let the boy realize how naked he had left him, shivering in the whistling blackness, with only a pale blue nightgown round his skinny body, a wreath of daisies for headgear.

"Is that all?" he asked, with a deadly attempt at casualness.

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Then the boy gave tongue, with a voice so shrill and terrible that it seemed to pierce the ear-drums.

"That's all!" he screamed. "I tell you that's all. I didn't dream nothing more! Nothing at all!"

The eyes glared. The jaw was so rigid that the words came through with the effect of ventriloquy.

For the first time in the encounter Mr. Dofferty's intellectual interest was aroused. He forgot his anger with the boy and his shame of himself. He was conscious only of an exceeding curiosity. What more was it the boy had dreamed, the terror of which made him a gibbering idiot? What on earth could it be?

"Listen, Albert," he said coaxingly. "Don't be frightened. I know you dreamed something more. I'd like to know what it was. Won't you tell me?"

"Nothing more! I didn't dream nothing more!" The boy stamped his feet.

"I assure you, you're going to tell me!" Mr. Dofferty said. "You might as well tell me now, as later."

He was not going to have the struggle start all over again. He was feeling completely worn out. He got down from the table. The cane had fallen to the floor. He reached down and lifted it. He swished it through the air. "Won't you tell me, Albert?" he asked once again.

The boy said nothing.

Then the man's patience snapped. The cane went hissing into the air and came screaming down again. He did not know where it landed, on the boy's hands, body, or face.

The boy did not know, either. He knew nothing more excepting that the whole world was a blackness with a great wind roaring in it. Then, at last, the wind ceased roaring and there was light in the world again. He became aware that he was in the sanctum of Mr. Dofferty, his headmaster. He became aware of Mr. Dofferty's body extended interminably between his own legs and the legs of the table. The Malay kris that Mr. Dofferty used as a paper-knife stuck out from between his ribs.

The boy leaned forward, pointing towards the ivory handle, where the blood gushed above the blade.

"That's what I dreamed!" his lips went. "That's what I dreamed!"

Now that you have finished Louis Golding's "Pale Blue Nightgown," we hope you agree with us that it is one of the most remarkable short stories you have ever read . . .

The story first appeared in book form in a limited edition of only 64 copies — 60 for public sale and 4 probably retained by the publisher, Lord Carlow, whose Corvinus Press of London issued the slim volume in October 1936. In this edition (one of the truly rare first editions among

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modern English books) the story is followed by a Postscript, specially written by the author. Mr. Golding's postscript is so fascinating, and throws such a brilliant light on the conception of "Pale Blue Nightgown," that we cannot refrain from quoting it in full.

"Several of my friends," wrote Mr. Golding, "including Lord Carlow who printed this tale, have suggested that it might add to its interest if I concluded with, as a postscript, a brief note regarding its origin.

"I dreamed this tale, as I have dreamed tales before. I mean that I have dreamed events, in which I personally may, or may not, have been involved, and at a certain stage in the dreaming I have said to myself, 'I will make a tale out of this dream. It ought to make a good tale.'

"Sometimes I have made the resolution after the dream was over, at the moment of awakening. But that is perhaps not unusual. The interest lies in the concurrence of the tale-making impulse with the dreaming of the events dreamed, while the dream mind was still unconscious of their denouement.

"I say that I have dreamed tales before and decided to write them. But I have never actually done so till now. For the fact was that they proved to be nonsense, as most dreams are, with no coherence in episode and character and with no finale, in any acceptable literary value.

" 'Pale Blue Nightgown' was unlike them. The characters are as real to me now as they were when I dreamed them. The central situation still terrifies me as it terrified me the night it evolved between a bed-sheet and a pillow-case drenched with sweat. The denouement has as much 'surprise,' in the formal O. Henry sense, as any tale I have composed in my waking moments.

"I remember two things in that night-dreaming, the appalling vividness of the events themselves, and my insistence throughout: 'What a good story this will make.' I think I was trying to comfort myself for my profound wretchedness. I was equally sorry for the poor small boy and the poor headmaster. My heart was wracked with pity for them.

"At the same time I was consumed with curiosity. 'How,' I asked myself, 'is it going to end?' The ending was as startling and terrifying to myself as it has been to my friends since, if I am to believe them.

"To sum up. On one level I was dreaming a dream, on another level my conscious literary mind was preoccupying itself with the dream as literary material. On still another level, one of the characters I was dreaming himself had dreamed a dream which gave the whole dream episode its motive power and its denouement.

"It is that superimposition of levels of consciousness which has seemed odd enough to absolve these words of postscript from the charge of impertinence. So I hope, at least."

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BLACKMAIL

by STEPHEN McKENNA

We were talking, half a dozen of us, about undetected crime; and as law-abiding citizens love to do, we had expended a wealth of ingenuity in arguing how we could improve on the crude methods of those criminals who were sooner or later called to account. Lonsdale, the captain of the *Istria*, propounded three devices by which a man could disappear without leaving a trace; and the ship's doctor sketched a gruesome series of murders which would defy *post mortem* examination. Our fecundity of invention was only equaled by our callousness of execution; and when the one parson on board rather incongruously joined our group, I felt he must be silently thanking heaven that we were men of substance and position without any pressing temptation to earn a livelihood by our unscrupulous wits or to escape the consequences by our desperate resource.

"Though the fact remains," said the captain, going back to our starting-point, "that in England at least there are very few undiscovered crimes of the first order — very few indeed."

"Because," I insisted, "there are very few criminals of the first order. Take blackmail. I can't remember a single prosecution where the wretched victim hasn't been so tortured that exposure becomes preferable to slow bleeding to death. Now, I maintain that the blackmailer who drives his victim to desperation is unworthy to practise. So is the murderer who can't bide his time. And so is any forger, coiner, or other criminal who can't work without an accomplice."

"And yet," objected the captain, "you can't hope to learn your job unless you have been properly apprenticed."

"I'm disposed to think, on the contrary," I answered, "that most great artists are self-taught. However that may be, whether it's navigating a ship or removing an appendix or preaching a sermon or — in my own field — writing a novel, I abhor the gifted, but untrained, amateur. The only time I was blackmailed, a shifty-eyed creature hinted that he knew something against me and that, if I didn't pay him ten pounds, he would — in his own words — 'blow the gaff.' Well, I locked the door and telephoned for the police. While we waited for them to come, I told this fellow that he was a disgrace to his profession — using language that would probably get him seven years' penal servitude, and risking his liberty for less than he would have got if he'd called himself a piano-tuner and gone off with the drawing-room silver. If we'd had another five

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minutes, I'd have given him a lesson or two in his own job."

The black-bearded padre who had been the last to join us leaned forward to ask with a smile whether they might not all be given the benefit of my instruction.

"Well," I said, "the first commandment for every criminal must be: *Thou shalt not be found out.* The artist in blackmail must never be handed over to the police. If he is, he must bring and win an action for malicious prosecution. The word blackmail must never be used: If it is, he must bring and win an action for slander. A very dignified and sensitive ornament of society, my blackmailer is; and he works patiently . . ."

"If he can afford to wait," the padre interposed, "will he take to crime?"

"If he can't afford to wait," I rejoined, "he'd certainly better not try. Now, what is to be the skeleton in my cupboard? That I did time in my youth for illicit diamond-buying? Very well! I've turned respectable, changed my name, married a wife, and made myself a first-rate position which would crumble and disappear if anyone knew I'd spent some years working on a breakwater at the Cape. The blackmailer finds out all this and makes an excuse to meet me. In the course of conversation he lets fall that he used to know South Africa very well in old days and watches to see how I take it. If I'm unmoved, he may ask if I was ever out there, he may even say he knew a man rather like me. Then he switches off to channel-swimming, motorboat racing, anything you like; and in due course he mentions his invalid wife, who's been ordered a five-hundred-guinea operation which he can't afford."

"And if you still don't rise?" asked the doctor.

"Then he goes back to the old South African days, perhaps telling me a story of a man who was caught as an I.D.B. And he tells it as though he's saying: '*Now we understand each other.*' Well, there's nothing in all this to justify me in locking the door and telephoning for the police. Why, bless my soul, if I did, I should find myself presented with a writ as soon as he could get in touch with a solicitor to serve it!"

Captain Lonsdale pondered my advice and rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Of course, you've compressed into one interview an attack which your artist would spread over many meetings," he murmured. "And your defense?"

"My only defense, if I can keep my nerve, is to indicate that the subject of South Africa doesn't interest me and to tell my servants that, if this fellow calls again, he's not to be admitted. Assuming I can do that, I've won. The second commandment for every blackmailer is: *Thou shalt know when thou art beaten.* But can I keep my nerve? The idea of exposure is very unpleasant for a highly respected citizen with a wife and family. It's not an admission of guilt if I give the fellow a hundred pounds towards his wife's operation. I've prospered; and

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he hasn't. Though he advances no claim and utters no threat, in a vague way I don't want to make an enemy of the man who knew South Africa in the days of my little misfortune. If you go to work on those lines, you never come close to the law."

"You must have a certain amount of luck as well," suggested Captain Lonsdale. "If I turned blackmailer, I shouldn't know where to begin."

"That's a question of preliminary spade-work," I answered. "If the skeleton you find is in the cupboard of a cabinet minister or a millionaire, so much the easier for you; but, if you explore every cupboard you meet, you'll find a surprising number of skeletons inside them. We *all* of us have something in our lives that we'd give a good deal to suppress." I looked up to discover the black-bearded padre's eye fixed rather coldly on me. "At least, I speak for myself," I hastened to add. "I once got into a position where I'd have given the clothes off my back and my skin under the clothes to hush things up. Needless to say, I was entirely innocent."

"Would it be indiscreet to ask for the story?" inquired the ship's doctor.

"It happened so long ago," I said, "that I've forgotten half the names of the people concerned. Before the war, it was; and I should imagine the time of year was September or October, as I was going to America for a lecturing tour and had to get it finished in time to spend Christmas in the South Seas. The ship we will call the *Joan of Arc;* and of several hundred passengers the only two that matter were a middle-aged American business-man, who'd been taking a cure at Nauheim, and a young American woman, who was returning home after a tour in Europe. I will call them Mr. Nelson and Mrs. Villeneuve. Each was traveling alone; and I can't tell you whether they'd ever met before they found themselves sitting together at the chief engineer's table. I was very busy, putting the finishing touches to my lectures, and I shouldn't even have noticed them if they hadn't got in my way.

"This they did quite literally. Mrs. Villeneuve's cabin was next to mine; and I used to bump into her half a dozen times a day when she was playing the fool with any man who'd skylark with her. Since Noah's ark first floated on the face of the waters I presume there has always been a woman who constituted herself the 'life and soul of the ship'; and I'd cast Mrs. Villeneuve for this part before we were out of Southampton Water. By the end of the first day she was on Christian-name terms with the wireless operators, she'd danced with every man under fifty and sat out on the boat-deck with everyone over, and she'd drunk cocktails with anybody who asked her, regardless of age. She was an attractive creature, in a flashy, impudent way, but I was not sorry when she accorded the fat Middle-Westerner the privilege of holding her hand and paying for her drinks.

"Mr. Nelson, as I've called him, got

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in my way almost everywhere on the ship. When I walked round the deck before breakfast, he was stretched on a long chair in the narrowest part. When I went down to breakfast, his enormous bulk was filling the companion-way. And when I went aft for my gin-and-bitters before luncheon, the smoking-room was entirely filled by Mr. Nelson. He must have been a big man at any time, but this heart-trouble had made a monster of him. Long before we got into hot weather over Banks I was beginning to feel anxious; and he was utterly reckless about his health. I shall get into trouble with the doctor here if I poach on his preserves, but I can't believe — as a layman — that any man, recently discharged from Nauheim, was wise in eating three huge meals a day, drinking all the time between, and smoking one immense, black cigar after another.

"I should think it was the promise of free champagne nightly that attracted Mrs. Villeneuve. Nelson hadn't much else to commend him; but by the second or third day out they'd definitely paired off. Their own corner in the smoking-room and a brace of cocktails waiting for them before luncheon and dinner. Their chairs side by side on deck. Instructions to the barman to keep them regularly fed with whiskies-and-sodas as soon as the bar opened in the evening. I suppose we've all of us seen that kind of thing a hundred times. It's an inevitable part of life at sea. One thinks nothing of it, unless people make nuisances of themselves, though it left an unpleasant taste in the mouth when you heard that this woman had a husband and two children in New York and that Nelson was a grandfather.

"Their morals, however, were no concern of mine; and I didn't worry until Mrs. Villeneuve adjourned the festivities from the smoking-room to her cabin. Then I complained to the purser. I was working pretty hard and I wanted to sleep. The purser couldn't give me much satisfaction, as the people on the other side were taking it all without protest. I then tackled the smoking-room steward and asked if he couldn't carry the drinks to Nelson's quarters, but I was told that Nelson was sharing his cabin with another man. After that, I was reduced to empty threats. If Nelson disturbed me again, I said, I'd go into Mrs. Villeneuve's cabin and pitch him out. They were a bit quieter after this, but you know how thin the partitions are between a ship's cabins. There was whispering, giggling, clinking of glasses, striking of matches. . . . The next night I walked about on deck until Nelson came up for a breath of air.

"And the night after, though he didn't come up then till half-past twelve. It was our last evening; otherwise I should have gone to the captain or given Nelson a piece of my mind. As it was, I said nothing, though we were alone on the boat-deck for ten minutes and went down to our state-rooms within two yards of each other. Rather like two dogs, you know: Each

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waiting for the other to growl first. I was braced up to hear him say: 'So you're telling people you're going to wring my neck if I want to say good-night to a friend?'; and he was expecting me to come out with: 'In the name of decency, why can't you stick to your own cabin?' We stalked in silent hatred past each other half a dozen times, then went below. Tonight everything was quiet in the next cabin; but, alas, by this time the desire for sleep had left me! I tried to read, but my eyes were tired; and after a very few minutes I put on a coat over my pajamas and went on deck again.

"How long I was there I can't tell you to a minute; but it was well after two before I went down again. I was wearing rubber-soled shoes and I walked as quietly as I could for fear of waking the other passengers. When I was about ten yards from my cabin, Mrs. Villeneuve's door opened and she came out in a dressing-gown and slippers. I felt sure she'd seen me, but she was evidently too much concerned with matters of greater moment; and her job at this season was to get Nelson to bed without rousing the whole ship. It seemed that, after establishing an alibi on the boat-deck, he'd stolen back to his little friend; and to judge by appearances, he'd gone just a bit too far this time. He was absolutely incapable, sprawling across the floor of the passage in striped pajamas and leaving the question how he should get back to his cabin for someone else to answer.

"My first impulse, naturally, was to lend a hand. Mrs. Villeneuve was a tiny slip of a woman; and Nelson was seventeen stone if he was a pound. Then it occurred to me that I shouldn't be thanked for butting in. After all, if she wanted help, she could ask for it; but when a woman has been entertaining a man in her cabin at two o'clock in the morning, she doesn't generally want the world to know about it. I thought that if I gave her time to throw a bucket of water over Nelson's head, he might be able to shift for himself. If not, I must let her decide whether she would take the night-watchman or me or Nelson's stable-companion into her confidence. I went on deck again, leaving her to struggle with her friend.

"When I came back, they were both gone. And as I turned in, I heard something very like crying. I'm afraid I couldn't feel the slightest sympathy with her. She was worse than I'd imagined, drunken, immoral, and a public nuisance into the bargain. My sole consolation in a disturbed night was that in four-and-twenty hours I need never give her another thought. Or so I imagined until my steward called me with the news that Nelson had been found dead in his bunk.

"The entire ship's company had to spare her a good many thoughts after that! My steward's story was that he'd found Nelson lying half out of bed, black in the face and rigid. The doctor said he must have been dead several hours. And that's all we knew by breakfast-time. Afterwards there was

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a formal inquiry, but it brought nothing new to light. The stable-companion swore that he'd seen and heard nothing out of the ordinary and that Nelson had been sleeping quite peacefully when he himself turned in between twelve and one. There was no call for help, no sound of a seizure. Mrs. Villeneuve testified that Nelson had been all right when he left her at midnight after coming to her cabin for a final drink; and the passengers generally, when they'd recovered from the first shock, brought in an unofficial verdict of death from natural causes.

"I felt that this might be true enough so far as it went, but it wasn't the whole truth. I couldn't say, I can't say now, whether Nelson died in Mrs. Villeneuve's cabin or in his own or on the way there: But she was lying when she pretended that he hadn't come back to her after the All-Clear signal. And the stable-companion was lying when he said he'd seen and heard nothing. Assume, if you like, that when he turned in Nelson had been 'sleeping quite peacefully' or shamming sleep; he *probably* heard him getting up and he must certainly have heard him being brought back. In all likelihood he'd helped Mrs. Villeneuve. Only the strength of desperation enabled her to drag that weight along the passage. She couldn't conceivably have lifted it up to the bunk. No, these two had worked together and they'd agreed on their story without dreaming that anyone would upset it.

"For most of that day I argued with myself whether I ought to upset it. If there'd been the faintest suspicion of foul play, I must have put in my evidence; but in a few hours' time this miserable woman's husband, Nelson's children and grandchildren would be coming to meet the ship. How could it benefit anyone to know that he had died in her cabin, probably in her arms? I decided to hold my tongue.

"My first lecture was arranged for the night after I landed; and for more than two months I was traveling and speaking from one end of the States to the other. I saw hardly any papers, except local sheets travestying my lectures; and even the New York reporters couldn't make much copy out of the fact that one of my fellow-passengers had died on the voyage. It was a disagreeable episode, but quite a common one; and gradually I ceased to think about it.

"From time to time, indeed, I speculated about the principal actors in this sordid little tragedy. Were the Nelsons mourning an exemplary husband and father? Putting up a monument to him in his hometown? And Mrs. Villeneuve? Was she turning over a new leaf? And the stable-companion? Though I never knew his name, he was the one who interested me most. This woman was in the hollow of his hand. If he chose to blackmail her, there was no limit to the pressure he could apply. At first he could threaten to tell the whole story to her husband. When he'd exhausted

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the possibilities of this, he could get to work in earnest. Everyone assumed that Nelson had died of heart-failure, but what if she had contributed to it? One word against another; and the only man who could judge between them was dead. If the stable-companion pretended that he'd heard a scuffle, that this woman had hit Nelson . . .

"He would, of course, have to withdraw his first story that Nelson had been asleep when he went to bed, but he could say that he had tried to shield the woman and that now his conscience was troubling him. Mark you, I don't suppose for a moment that he did any of these things; but, as a novelist, my imagination was stirred by the thought of the hold that he — and I, for that matter — had over this woman. At one time I seriously considered making some inquiries and telling her — by means of an anonymous letter, if need be — that if she found herself molested, there was one man who could give the true story of that night.

"In fact, I did nothing. I assumed, rather lazily, that the whole thing had blown over by now; and, as I couldn't help Mrs. Villeneuve without revealing that Nelson had spent his last moments of life in her cabin at two in the morning, I knew she wouldn't call on me unless she were threatened with the 'chair.' Besides, the more I thought over this business, the more I wanted to keep entirely clear of it. For my own comfort and convenience I had slipped away on a lecture-tour without disclosing certain important facts about an unexplained death. I had held my tongue while Mrs. Villeneuve and the stable-companion signed declarations which I knew to be untrue. If I were called as a witness, I should be in a false position from the first.

"People who aren't lawyers are unreasonably terrified by the thought of cross-examination. On my way to the South Seas I was appalled to realize the case that even a very moderate counsel could make against me. Why did I wish to shelter this worthless woman? Had I not called her attractive? Did she *mean* anything to me? If not, why was I impeding justice on her behalf? If so . . .? Was not my cabin next to hers? Had I not expressed my disapproval of her friendship with Nelson, my personal hostility to the man? . . . In a short time I might expect to find this death from natural causes converted into manslaughter, perhaps murder, and to learn that Nelson and I had been fighting for Mrs. Villeneuve.

"You mustn't take this too seriously, of course. I didn't take it very seriously myself, but it warned me against rash impulses. I did not write, even anonymously, to Mrs. Villeneuve. In holding my tongue I believe I did the right thing, the thing you would all have done, the thing I should do again if I found myself in a similar position. I now see a risk, however, which I hadn't envisaged at the time. Going back to my theory of blackmail as a fine art, I should feel

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my skin pricking *rather* uncomfortably if a man told me that we'd met on the *Joan of Arc* and that his wife had been ordered an operation which he couldn't afford. Your position becomes so infernally uncertain when it's only your word against the other fellow's. That's the only skeleton in my blameless cupboard, but I maintain that we all of us have something that we'd pay to keep concealed."

When I came to the end of my story, Captain Lonsdale inquired whether in fact the man whom I called the stable-companion had profited by his knowledge to levy blackmail on the unfortunate Mrs. Villeneuve. I told him that I had heard nothing of them or of the other passengers from that day to this.

After a few moments' silence the black-bearded padre asked whether I thought my running away had conceivably imperiled the life or liberty of anyone else.

"The stable-companion, for instance," he explained. "If this Nelson was dragged some distance along a passage-floor, his body may well have been scratched and bruised. Fat men mark easily. Even if the ship's doctor suspected no foul play, don't you think that the relations or the port health-officer may have wondered a little?"

"The stable-companion," I answered, "would be saved by absence of motive. Why should he want to kill the fellow?"

"Oh, I don't suggest a charge of murder; but, if it was established that this Nelson was a heavy drinker and an obnoxious person generally, it's not difficult to imagine an altercation, an exchange of blows. You might get a verdict of manslaughter. Mrs. Villeneuve swears that Nelson was all right when he left her after that last drink. When the steward comes round in the morning, he finds a dead body bearing, possibly, marks of violence. If we're to believe the sworn statements, Nelson, once inside his cabin, never left it again. The violence done him between night and morning, therefore, must have been done by someone in the cabin. Now, a word from you that you'd seen Nelson an hour or whatever it was after he left the boat-deck, seen him outside his cabin, with this woman who swore she'd last seen him an hour earlier, seen him in pajamas, dead or dying: A word to that effect would have cleared the stable-companion."

"To some extent," I agreed. "It would get him into trouble of another kind, though. What happens to his sworn statement? And the woman's?"

"They'd have to admit it was false," said the padre. "A desperate effort to save the woman's reputation. The penalty, however, for perjury is a small thing compared with the penalty for manslaughter. When it's a man's liberty against a woman's name, perhaps an estimable man against an admittedly worthless woman . . ."

I began to feel that the excellent padre was rather unfairly using my tale as a text for a sermon. I looked at my watch and stood up.

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"I had little time to think," I answered. "I hope nobody did in fact suffer from my silence . . . Is anyone proposing to turn in?"

We drifted out on deck and walked with the doctor to the head of the after companion-way, where he descended to his surgery. Then we accompanied the captain to the door of his cabin by the bridge. One by one, our party scattered; and, when I came to my own deck, only the padre was left.

"That story of yours interested me more than I can say," he murmured, as I stopped at the alley-way to my stateroom. "For *Joan of Arc* I suppose we may read *Maid of Flanders*. I knew her well in old days."

It would be ridiculous to pretend that I was not startled, but I believe I concealed my surprise.

"The North Atlantic Transport Line?"

"The same! I remember a man rather like you. Nineteen-thirteen. I forget if Burgess had swum the channel then and I've never taken any interest in motorboat racing."

I am perhaps unreasonably prejudiced against clerical humor, but I thought my companion was being rather heavy-handed in turning against me the jocular precepts which I had recommended for blackmail.

"You were on board that trip?" I asked with affected interest. "Then perhaps you recall the name of the man I've called Nelson."

"It was Lee. Maxton B. Lee. And 'Mrs. Villeneuve' was a Mrs. Kinloch Lasbury. You were only at the beginning of your career then, sir; you've prospered prodigiously since. I wish I could say the same for myself." He paused and looked at me with a slight frown, as though he were repeating a lesson and had forgotten the next line. "The stable-companion," he then continued, "was a mining-engineer called Grainger. Sinclair was skipper. The doctor was an Irishman, O'Casey. The barman was known as William — William Hussey his full name was — and Lee's room-steward was a Welshman called Morgan."

"You have a remarkable memory," I said.

"Well, they all gave evidence," explained the padre.

"Then there *was* an inquiry?"

The black beard dipped in a deliberate nod. The dark eyes glittered suddenly as though to prepare me for the cream of the jest:

"A trial. Now you understand my asking whether your policy of silence might not have been a little hard on the prisoner. And you've heard nothing from that day to this? Well, I suppose you were in the depths of Dakota or Texas when it came on, lecturing on the present position of the English novel. It was an interesting case."

"You were there?"

The glitter turned to a blaze.

"I was the prisoner. Before that, I had been the stable-companion. After that . . . *After* that . . . For five of the best years of a man's life . . . Years that have no cash-equivalent

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. . . Heart-breaking years of degradation and injustice and ruin . . . For five years I was an inmate of a United States prison. I suppose you're not in any great hurry for bed? I can assure you that you're not likely to sleep for a long time yet."

When I left the smoking-room, I was feeling tired and a little stupefied after several hours in a hot and noisy room. Once on deck, my head began to clear. And by the time that my companion suggested a short walk before turning in, I was at least mentally fit to attack the question whether he was an inspired practical joker, a dangerous lunatic, or a man hideously wronged and fiercely determined on revenge.

"This is about my usual time for going to bed," I told him.

"But this is an unusual occasion! Doesn't a yarn about old days appeal to you? I fear I'm not the 'dignified and sensitive ornament to society' that you would like, but five years of prison and ten of living by one's wits take off the early polish. Needless to say, I'm not a parson, but a clerical outfit is a useful disguise. There are one or two mining engineers on board this ship, but they've none of them penetrated the Reverend George Winter to the John Grainger underneath. Well, now; a sick wife is one of the few troubles I *haven't* had . . ."

"But you think I might help you on other grounds?" I interrupted. "Our acquaintance is slight. Your name . . . or names . . ."

"The New York police can identify me by my thumb prints."

"And why do you single me out?"

My companion wagged his head and laughed disagreeably:

"I'm appealing to your generosity. You observe that I make no claim and use no threats."

"I observe also that you've taken a long time to make your appeal. You've been at large for ten years, you would have me believe?"

"But till tonight I didn't see how I could make my appeal . . . convincing, shall I say? If you'd locked the door and telephoned for the police . . . My record was against me. I prefer in every way your peaceful persuasion."

"And as you paid me the compliment of attending so carefully, you doubtless remember my warning that the artistic blackmailer must admit when he's beaten. Nine times out of ten, the victim will pay. The tenth time he'll look for the whisper of a shadow of a ghost of a threat and then he'll hit back. Our conversation tonight will be repeated to the captain tomorrow, as accurately as I can recollect it. I shall ask him to call on you to corroborate it. If you stick to your guns, there'll be a Scotland Yard man waiting on the quay . . ."

My companion opened his eyes in well-simulated surprise.

"If I thought that was a threat . . ." he murmured. "You don't suggest I'm trying to . . . *blackmail* you? If you mean that, if you'll say it in the captain's presence, you'll be served

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with a writ as soon as I can find a solicitor to serve it."

"Scotland Yard," I said with an attempt at lightness, "will be interested to know why a mining engineer called Grainger is traveling as a parson named Winter. If you tell the captain it was all a joke and you were trying to frighten me, you *may* persuade him to accept it in that spirit, but I shall take what measures I think fit to protect myself against similar 'jokes' in future. I think we understand each other now . . ."

My companion shook his head with an expression almost of pity.

"You don't begin to understand," he told me. "Rule out the practical-joke idea. Five years in an American prison take the edge off a man's sense of humor. Rule out the idea that I'm a chance blackmailer who sees the possibilities of the story you told us tonight. I've shown you that I know the names you hid up under your 'Nelson' and 'Villeneuve' and '*Joan of Arc*.' I can remind you, if you've forgotten, that you worked on the port side of the promenade-deck in a green-and-white striped chair with your name painted on the top; and you wrote left-handed, because you had neuritis in your other arm. I could tell you things you've never known. Lee — or 'Nelson' — was dead when you saw him. He dropped down in Mrs. Lasbury's cabin. She only wanted to drag him far enough away to keep people from thinking he'd been with her, but she made so much noise that I came out into the alley-way. She told me what had happened; and I helped her to carry the body in. We agreed, like fools, to pretend he'd died in his sleep.

"If I'd kept my head," he went on, "I should have dressed again and gone on deck and come down later and given the alarm. He had some big bruises; and his pajamas were torn. I paid for that little mistake with five of the best years of my life. A word from you would have saved me, but you were too busy thinking of your own safety. Not that I blame you. I know what it means to have a dead body lying at your feet and one man's word against another. That Lasbury woman would have put the blame on you, me, the ship's cat, if she'd had a chance. She was terrified, dangerous. And I'd have shifted the blame to you or anyone else if I'd seen how to do it."

He broke off with a mutter of "Five years! Five mortal years!" Then he turned with a bow of fiercely ironical deference:

"You were wise to keep out of the mess. After all, you were the last man known to have seen this Lee alive. You'd told O'Casey, the doctor, that, if Lee kept you awake another night, you'd go into Mrs. Lasbury's cabin and chuck him out. My stars, I got five years on less suspicion than that! I don't wonder at your saying you'd give the clothes off your back and the skin under the clothes to keep this little skeleton in its cupboard. It's not only that you're a well-known literary man. If there was another inquiry,

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you might find yourself standing where I stood. The Lees are still lamenting a valued member of their family. Mrs. Lasbury will sign and swear anything to keep out of the dock. And I . . ."

As he paused again, I invited him to go on.

"Well, I feel that somebody must compensate me for all I've gone through, all I've lost," he answered. "Until tonight I meant to divide the bill between England and America. There's been a miscarriage of justice. If the government of New York State won't make amends, the people of the two countries will. I'm writing the story of the trial and of my life in prison. The publishers have given me quite a good contract. My only trouble is that I'm not a trained writer. There have been times when I've thought of giving the whole thing up, but I need the money. I'd give it up tonight if anyone would make it worth my while."

"Have you tried the Lees or Mrs. Lasbury?" I inquired contemptuously.

The black beard dipped once more; and once more the glittering eyes fixed me with a piercing intensity which I took to mean that this was the last round.

"They couldn't pay ten thousand pounds," he answered. "And that's what I expect to make by the book and the serial rights. Nothing less than ten thousand pounds is worth my while . . . Now I mustn't keep you up any longer. We understand each other."

Winner of 3rd Story-Title Contest

The $100 prize for the best title for August Derleth's story in the December issue of *EQMM* was awarded to:

John H. Marion
Richmond, Virginia

In addition, because of the large number of entries and their high average of excellence, the judges decided to award Honorable Mentions to 18 other contestants, each of whom will receive a one-year free subscription to *EQMM*. The Honorable Mention winners were: Dorothy Brennan, Washington, D. C.; Ruby E. Briggs, Carmel-by-the-Sea, Calif.; Mrs. Gerald Cripe, Newport, Oreg.; Betty Fagan, Erie, Pa.; Mrs. Gene Hanselmann, Chattanooga, Tenn.; Jack Harper, New Bedford, Mass.; James F. Hayes, Evanston, Ill.; Kathleen Holt, Chicago, Ill.; Ruth J. Howe, Willoughby, Ohio; Margaret Linss, Albany, N. Y.; George H. Milliken, Los Angeles, Calif.; Charles E. Minton, Albuquerque, N. M.; Capt. John F. Nebinger, Fort Benning, Ga.; Edward Randolph, New York, N. Y.; Mrs. J. A. Stephenson, Kansas City, Mo.; Harold Vinal, New York, N. Y.; A. M. Weil, Philadelphia, Pa.; Genevieve Williams, Massillon, Ohio.

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". . . All who joy would win
Must share it,—happiness was born a twin."
—LORD BYRON

When the manuscript of T. S. Stribling's newest Poggioli story reached our desks, and we had read it, we experienced an immediate double-barreled reaction: first, that this latest Poggioli tale is one of the professor's most interesting criminal investigations, and second, that it cried out to be published as half of a 'tec tandem — with Melville Davisson Post's Uncle Abner story, "A Twilight Adventure" . . . There are certain things in the world which come naturally and inevitably in pairs: love birds, shoes, candlesticks, bacon and eggs. In the same way there are certain stories in the literary world which have a natural and inevitable affinity. It might be a basically similar plot point, or a parallel mood, or an analogous background; the twin stories have something in common, yet are completely individual.

We have brought you such double-entries in the past — only last month we paired a Damon Runyon story with, of all possibilities, a Michael Arlen story. You will remember also the curious resemblance between Ernest Hemingway's "The Killers" and W. R. Burnett's "Dressing Up." And surely Frank R. Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?" is perfectly complemented by Barry Perowne's "The Blind Spot," and for entirely different reasons one could bracket Edgar Allan Poe's "The Gold-Bug" and A. Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Dancing Men."

Yes, many stories are brothers and sisters under the skin, and some bear a strong family likeness; as in the case of human beings, however, every truly fine story has its own distinctive personality not quite *like any other . . .*

In the new Stribling story (blame your Editors for the title), Professor Poggioli and his "Watson" stop over in a small Tennessee town while motoring through the South. All they intended was to have lunch and drive on. Yet in the short time of a sandwich stopover Poggioli investigates a murder mystery, prevents a miscarriage of justice, and teaches a lesson in mass psychology and civilized behavior. In the Melville Davisson Post story Uncle Abner and his "Watson" stop over at a Virginia crossroad leading to a grove of beech trees, and in this short interruption of their journey Uncle Abner investigates an altogether different kind of murder

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mystery, prevents an altogether different kind of miscarriage of justice, and teaches a lesson in an altogether different kind of mass psychology and civilized behavior . . .

A DAYLIGHT ADVENTURE

by T. S. STRIBLING

THE following notes concerning Mrs. Cordy Cancy were not made at the time of her alleged murder of her husband, James Cancy. Worse than that, they were not taken even at the time of her trial, but seven or eight months later at the perfectly hopeless date when Sheriff Matheny of Lanesburg, Tennessee, was in the act of removing his prisoner from the county jail to the state penitentiary in Nashville.

Such a lapse of time naturally gave neither Professor Henry Poggioli nor the writer opportunity to develop those clues, fingerprints, bullet wounds, and psychological analyses which usually enliven the story of any crime.

Our misfortune was that we motored into Lanesburg only a few minutes before Sheriff Matheny was due to motor out of the village with his prisoner. And even then we knew nothing whatever of the affair. We simply had stopped for lunch at the Monarch café in Courthouse Square, and we had to wait a few minutes to get stools at the counter. Finally, two men vacated their places. As Poggioli sat down, he found a copy of an old local newspaper stuck between the paper-napkin case and a ketchup bottle. He unfolded it and began reading. As he became absorbed almost at once in its contents, I was sure he had found a murder story, because that is about all the professor ever reads.

I myself take no interest in murders. I have always personally considered them deplorable rather than entertaining. The fact that I make my living writing accounts of Professor Poggioli's criminological investigations, I consider simply as an occupational hazard and hardship.

The square outside of our café was crowded with people and filled with movement and noise. In the midst of this general racket I heard the voice of some revivalist preacher booming out through a loudspeaker, asking the Lord to save Sister Cordy Cancy from a sinner's doom, and then he added the rather unconventional phrase that Sister Cordy was not the "right" sinner but was an innocent woman, or nearly so.

That of course was faintly puzzling — why a minister should broadcast such a remark about one of his penitents. Usually the Tennessee hill preacher makes his converts out to be very bad persons indeed, and strongly in need of grace, which I suppose most

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of us really are. Now to hear one woman mentioned in a prayer as "nearly innocent" was a sharp break from the usual.

I suppose Poggioli also caught the name subconsciously, for he looked up suddenly and asked me if the name "Cancy" had been called. I told him yes, and repeated what I had just heard over the megaphone.

The criminologist made some sort of silent calculation, then said, "Evidently Mrs. Cancy has had her baby and the sheriff is starting with her to the penitentiary in Nashville."

I inquired into the matter. Poggioli tapped his paper. "Just been reading a stenographic account of the woman's trial which took place here in Lanesburg a little over seven months ago. She was sentenced to life imprisonment, but she was pregnant at the time, so the judge ruled that she should remain here in Lanesburg jail until the baby was born and then be transferred to the state penitentiary in Nashville. So I suppose by this noise that the baby has arrived and the mother is on her way to prison."

Just as my companion explained this the preacher's voice boomed out, "Oh, Lord, do something to save Sister Cordy! Sheriff Matheny's fixin' to start with her to Nashville. Work a miracle, Oh, Lord, and convince him she is innocent. You kain't desert her, Lord, when she put all her faith an' trust in You. She done a small crime as You well know, but done it with a pyure heart and for Yore sake. So come down in Yore power an' stop the sheriff and save an innocent woman from an unjust sentence. Amen." Then in an aside which was still audible over the megaphone, "Sheriff Matheny, give us five minutes more. He's bound to send Sister Cordy aid in the next five minutes."

Now I myself am a Tennessean, and I knew how natural it was for a hill-country revivalist to want some special favor from the Lord, and to want it at once; but I had never before heard one ask the rescue of a prisoner on her way to Nashville. I turned to Poggioli and said, "The minister admits the woman has committed some smaller crime. What was that?"

"Forgery," he replied. "She forged her husband's will in favor of herself, then applied the proceeds to build a new roof on the Leatherwood church. That's part of the court record."

"And what's the other crime — the one she claims to be innocent of?"

"The murder of her husband, Jim Cancy. She not only claims to be innocent, she really is. The testimony in the trial proved that beyond a doubt."

I was shocked. "Then why did the judge condemn . . ."

The criminologist drew down his lips. "Because the proof of her innocence is psychological. Naturally, that lay beyond the comprehension of the jury, and the judge too, as far as that goes."

I stared at my companion. "Can you prove her innocence, now, at this late date?"

"Certainly, if this paper has printed

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the court reporter's notes correctly, and I'm sure it has."

"Why, this is the most amazing thing I ever heard of — hitting in like this!"

"What do you mean 'hitting in like this'?"

"Good heavens, don't you see? Just as the sheriff is starting off with an innocent woman, just as the preacher is asking the Lord to send down some power to save her, here you come along at exactly the right moment. You know she is innocent and can prove it!"

Poggioli gave the dry smile of a scientific man. "Oh, I see. You think my coming here is providential."

"Certainly. What else is there to think?"

"I regret to disillusion you, but it is not. It couldn't be. It is nothing more than an extraordinary coincidence — and I can prove that, too." With this my friend returned to his paper.

This left me frankly in a nervous state. It seemed to me we ought to do something for the woman outside. I looked at the man sitting next to us at the counter. He nodded his head sidewise at Poggioli. "He don't live around here, does he?"

I said he didn't.

"If he don't live here, how does he know what's happened in these parts?"

"You heard him say he read it in the paper."

"He didn't do no such thing. I watched him. He didn't read that paper a tall, he jest turned through it, like I would a picture book."

I told him that was Poggioli's way of reading. It is called sight-reading — just a look and he knew it.

The hill man shook his head, "Naw, Mister, I know better'n that. I've watched hunderds of men read that paper sence it's laid thar on the counter, and the fassest one tuk a hour an twelve minutes to git through."

I nodded. I was not interested, so I said, "I daresay that's true."

"Of course hit's so," he drawled truculently, "ever'thing I say is so."

"I'm not doubting your word," I placated, "it is you who are doubting mine. You see I know my friend's ability at sight-reading."

This silenced him for a few moments, then he said shrewdly, "Looky here, if he gits what he knows out'n that paper, how come him to say Cordy Cancy is innocent when the paper says she's guilty?"

"Because the judgment in the paper doesn't agree with the evidence it presents. My friend has gone over the evidence and has judged for himself that the woman is guilty of forgery but innocent of murder."

This gave the hill man pause. A certain expression came into his leathery face. "He's a detectif, ain't he?"

"Well, not exactly. He used to be a teacher in the Ohio State University, and he taught detectives how to detect."

"Mm — mm. Who hard [hired] him to come hyar?"

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"Nobody," I said, "he just dropped in by chance."

"Chanst, huh? You expeck me to b'leve that?"

"Yes, I must say I do."

"Well, jest look at it frum my stan'point — him comin' hyar the very minnit the preacher is prayin' fer he'p and the shurrf startin' with her to the penitentiary — a great detectif like him jest drap in by chanst. Do you expeck me to b'leve that?"

All this was delivered with the greatest heat and my seat-mate seemed to hold me personally responsible for the situation.

"Well, what do you believe?" I asked in an amiable tone which gave him permission to believe anything he wanted to and no hard feelings.

"Why, jess what I said. I b'leve he wuz hard."

His suspicion of Poggioli, who would never accept a penny for his criminological researches, amused me. "Well, that's your privilege, but if it would strengthen your faith in me I will say that to the best of my knowledge and belief Professor Henry Poggioli's arrival in Lanesburg, Tennessee, on the eve of Mrs. Cordy Cancy's committal to the Nashville penitentiary, was a coincidence, a whole coincidence, and nothing but a coincidence, so help me, John Doe."

I had hoped to lighten my companion's dour mood, but he arose gloomily from his stool.

"I hope the Lord forgives you fer mawkin' His holy words."

"They are not the Lord's holy words," I reminded him, "they're the sheriff's words when he swears in a witness."

"Anyway, you tuk His name in vain when you said 'em."

"Didn't mention His name, sir. I said 'John Doe'."

"Anyway, Brother," he continued in his menacing drawl, "you shore spoke with lightness. The Bible warns you aginst speakin' with lightness — you kain't git aroun' that." With this he took himself out of the café, scraping his feet in the doorway as a symbol of shaking my dust from his shoes.

As I watched the saturnine fellow go, Poggioli turned from his paper.

"Poses quite a riddle, doesn't he?"

"Not for me," I said. "I was born here in the hills."

"You understand him?"

"I think so."

"You didn't observe any more precise and concrete contradiction about him?"

I tried to think of some simple contradiction in the man, something plain. I knew when Poggioli pointed it out it would be very obvious, but nothing came to my mind. I asked him what he saw.

"Two quite contradictory reactions: he was disturbed about my being a detective and about your near profanity."

"I am afraid I don't quite see what you mean."

"I'll make it simpler. He evidently was a deacon in some church."

"Why do you say that?"

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"Because he reproved the 'lightness' of your language. The scriptures instruct deacons to reprove the faults of the brethren, and lightness of language is one of them. So he was probably a deacon."

"All right, say he was. What does that contradict?"

"His disturbance over my being a detective. Deacons are supposed to ally themselves with law and order."

I laughed. "You don't know your Tennessee hill deacons. That contradiction in them is historical. Their ancestors came here before the Revolution to worship God as they pleased and escape the excise tax. They have been for the Lord and against the law ever since."

At this point another man hurried from the square into the Monarch café. I noted the hurry because under ordinary circumstances hill men never hurry, not even in the rain. He glanced up and down the counter, immediately came to my companion, and lifted a hand. "Excuse me, Brother, but you're not a preacher?"

"No, I'm not," said my companion.

"Then you are the detective that was sent. Will you come with me?"

"Just what do you mean by 'sent'?" asked the criminologist.

"Why the Lord sent you," explained the man hurriedly but earnestly. "Brother Johnson was jest prayin' to the Lord to send somebody to prove Sister Cordy Cancy innocent and keep her from going to the pen. Jim Phipps heard you-all talkin' an' hurried out an' told us there was a detectif in here. So He's bound to have sent ye."

Poggioli reflected. "I am sure I can prove the woman innocent — from the evidence printed in this paper. But what good will that do, when the trial is over and the woman already sentenced?"

"Brother," said the countryman, "if the Lord started this work, don't you reckon He can go on an' finish it?"

"Look here, Poggioli," I put in, "we're here for some reason or other."

"Yes, by pure chance, by accident," snapped the psychologist. "Our presence has no more relation to this woman than . . ."

He was looking for a simile when I interrupted, "If you know she is innocent don't you think it your duty to —"

The psychologist stopped me with his hand and his expression. "I believe I do owe a duty . . . yes . . . yes, I owe a duty. I'll go do what I can."

The man who came for him was most grateful; so were all the people in the café, for they had overheard the conversation. Everybody was delighted except me. I didn't like Poggioli's tone, or the expression on his face. I wondered what he really was going to do.

Well, by the time we got out of the restaurant everybody in the square seemed to know who we were. There was a great commotion. The preacher's prayer for help had been answered instantly. It was a miracle.

The sound-truck which had been

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booming stood in front of the county jail on the south side of the square. Beside the truck was the sheriff's car with the woman prisoner handcuffed in the back seat. Near the car stood another woman holding a young baby in her arms. This infant, I gathered, was the prisoner's child, and would be left behind in the Lanesburg jail while its mother went on to the penitentiary in Nashville. The crowd naturally was in sympathy with the woman and expected us immediately to deliver her from her troubles. I heard one of the men say as we pushed forward, "That heavy man's the detective and that slim 'un's his stooge; he writes down what the big 'un does."

Frankly, I was moved by the situation, and I was most uneasy about the outcome. I asked Poggioli just what he meant to do.

He glanced at me as we walked. "Cure them of an illusion."

"Just what do you mean — cure them of an . . ."

He nodded at the crowd around us. "I will prove to these people the woman is innocent, but at the same time show that my proof can be of no benefit to the prisoner. This ought to convince the crowd that providence had nothing to do with the matter, and it ought to make them, as a group, a little more rationalistic and matter-of-fact. That is what I consider it my duty to do."

His whole plan appeared cruel to me. I said, "Well, thank goodness, you won't be able to do that in five minutes, and the sheriff gave them only that much more time before he starts out."

My hope to avoid Poggioli's demonstration was quashed almost at once. I saw the sheriff, a little man, climb out of his car, walk across to the sound-truck, and take the microphone from the minister. Then I heard the sheriff's voice boom out.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I understand there really is help on the way for Mrs. Cancy. Whether it is miraculous help or jest human help, I don't know. But anyway I'm extendin' Mrs. Cancy's time to prove her innocence one more hour before we start to Nashville."

A roar of approval arose at this. The minister in the truck then took over the loudspeaker, "Brothers and Sisters," he began in his more solemn drawl, "they ain't one ounce of doubt in my soul as to who sent this good man. I'll introduce him to you. He is Dr. Henry Poggioli the great detective some of you have read about in the magazines. The Lord has miraculously sent Dr. Poggioli to clear Sister Cordy Cancy from her troubles. And now I'll introduce Sister Cordy to Dr. Poggioli. Doctor, Sister Cordy don't claim complete innocence, but she's a mighty good woman. She did, however, forge her husban's will by takin' a carbon paper and some of his old love letters and tracin' out a will, letter by letter. She sees now that was wrong, but she was workin' for the glory of the Lord when she done it."

Shouts of approval here — "Glory

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be!" "Save her, Lord!" and so forth. The divine continued, "Jim Cancy, her husban', was a mawker and a scoffer. He wouldn't contribute a cent to the Lord's cause nor bend his knee in prayer. So Sister Cordy forged his will for religious ends. Now I guess the Lord knew Jim was goin' to git killed. But Sister Cordy didn't have a thing in the world to do with that. He jest got killed. And you all know what she done with his money — put a new roof on the Leatherwood churchhouse. Save her, Oh, Lord, from the penitentiary!" (Another uproar of hope and sympathy here) "And Brothers and Sisters, look how she acted in the trial, when suspicion fell on her for Jim's murder. She didn't spend one cent o' that money for a lawyer. She said it wasn't hers to spend, it was the Lord's and He would save her. She said she didn't need no lawyer on earth when she had one in Heaven. She said He would send her aid. And now, praise His name, He has sent it here at this eleventh hour." Again he was interrupted by shouts and applause. When a semi-silence was restored, he said, "Dr. Poggioli, you can now prove Sister Cordy innocent of her husband's murder and set her free."

In the renewed uproar the minister solemnly handed the microphone down to Poggioli on the ground. I have seldom been more nervous about any event in Poggioli's eventful career. I didn't suppose he would be in any actual danger from the irate hill people when they found out what he was trying to do, but on the other hand a mob can be formed in the South in about three minutes. And they are likely to do anything — ride a man out of town on a rail, tar and feather him, give him a switching, depending on how annoyed they are. Poggioli never lived in the South, he had no idea what he was tampering with.

He began, "Ladies and gentlemen, I have little to say. I have just read the report of Mrs. Cancy's trial in your county paper. From it I have drawn absolute proof of her innocence of her husband's murder, but unfortunately that proof can be of no benefit to her."

Cries of "Why won't it?" "What's the matter with it?" "What makes you talk like that?"

"Because, my friends, of a legal technicality. If I could produce new evidence the trial judge could reopen her case and acquit Mrs. Cancy. But a reinterpretation of old evidence is not a legal ground for a rehearing. All I can do now is to demonstrate to you from the evidence printed in your county paper that Mrs. Cancy is innocent of murder, but still she must go on with the Sheriff to the penitentiary in Nashville."

Despair filled the square; there arose outcries, pleas, oaths. The revivalist quashed this. He caught up his microphone and thundered, "Oh, ye of little faith, don't you see Sister Cordy's salvation is at hand? Do you think the Lord would send a detectif here when it wouldn't do no good?

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I'm as shore of victory as I'm standin' here. Brother Poggioli, go on talkin' with a good heart!"

The irony of the situation stabbed me: for Poggioli to intend a purely materialistic solution to the situation, and the minister who had besought his aid to hope for a miracle. It really was ironic. Fortunately, no one knew of this inner conflict except me or there would have been a swift outbreak of public indignation. The scientist began his proof:

"Ladies and gentlemen, your minister has recalled to your memory how Mrs. Cordy Cancy forged her husband's will by tracing each letter of it with a carbon paper from a package of her husband's old love letters. But he did not mention the fact that after she did this — after she had underscored and overscored these letters and made them the plainest and most conclusive proof of her forgery — she still kept those love letters! She did not destroy them. She put them in a trunk whose key was lost, and kept them in the family living room. Now every man, woman, and I might almost say child, sees clearly what this proves!"

Of course in this he was wrong. He overestimated the intelligence of his audience. Those nearer to him, who could make themselves heard, yelled for him to go on and explain.

"Further explanation is unnecessary," assured the psychologist. "If she felt sufficiently sentimental about her husband to preserve his love letters, obviously she did not mean to murder him. Moreover, she must have realized her marked-over letters would constitute absolute proof of the minor crime of forgery. She must have known that if her husband were murdered, her home would be searched and the tell-tale letters would be found. Therefore, she not only did not murder her husband herself but she had no suspicion that he would be murdered. Those letters in her unlocked trunk make it impossible that she should be either the principal or an accessory to his assassination."

A breath of astonishment went over the crowd at the simplicity of Poggioli's deduction. Everyone felt that he should have thought of that for himself.

Poggioli made a motion for quiet and indicated that his proof was not concluded. Quiet returned and the psychologist continued.

"Your minister tells us, and I also read it in the evidence printed in your county paper, that Mrs. Cancy did not hire an attorney to defend her in her trial. She used the entire money to place a new roof on the old Leatherwood church, and she told the court the reason she did this was because God would defend her."

Here shouts arose. "He did! He's doin' it now! He's sent you here to save her!"

Poggioli held up a hand and shook his head grimly. This was the point of his whole appearance in the square — the materialistic point by which he hoped to rid these hill people of too great a reliance on providential

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happenings and place them on the more scientific basis of self-help. He intoned slowly,

"I regret to say, ladies and gentlemen, that my appearance here is pure accident. Why? Because I have come too late. If a supernal power had sent me here to save an innocent woman — and she is an innocent woman — if a supernal power had sent me, it would certainly have sent me in time. But I am not in time. The trial is over. All the proof is in. We cannot possibly ask a new trial on the ground of a reinterpretation of old proof, which is what I am giving you. That is no ground for a new trial. So this innocent woman who is on her way to the penitentiary must go on and serve out her unjust term. My appearance here today, therefore, can be of no service to anyone and can be attributed to nothing but pure chance."

At this pitiful negation an uproar arose in the square. Men surged toward the sheriff, yelling for him to turn the woman free or they would do it for him. Cooler heads held back the insurgents and voices shouted out,

"Dr. Poggioli, who did do the murder? You know ever'thing — who done it!"

The criminologist wagged a negative hand. "I have no idea."

"The devil!" cried a thick-set fellow. "Go ahead an' reason out who killed Jim Cancy — jest like you reasoned out his wife was innocent!"

"I can't do that. It's impossible. I haven't studied the evidence of the murder, merely the evidence that proves non-murder — a completely different thing."

"Go ahead! Go ahead!" yelled half a dozen voices. "The Lord has he'ped you so fur — He'll stan by you!"

It was amusing, in a grim fashion, for the crowd to twist the very materialistic point Poggioli was making into a logical basis for a spiritualistic interpretation. However, I do not think Poggioli was amused. He held up his hands.

"Friends, how could I know anything about this when I stopped over for lunch in this village only one hour ago?"

A dried-up old farmer, whose face had about the color and texture of one of his own corn shucks, called out, "Somebody shot Jim, didn't they Dr. Poggioli?"

"Oh, yes, somebody shot him."

"Well, have you got any idyah of the kind of man who shot Jim Cancy?"

"Oh, certainly. I have a fairly clear idea of the kind of man who murdered Cancy."

"I allowed you had, Brother, I allowed you had," nodded the old fellow with satisfaction. "The Lord put it into my heart to ast you exactly that question." The old fellow turned to the officer, "Shurrf Matheny, has he got time to tell what kind of a fellow murdered Jim before you start with Sister Cordy to the pen?"

The officer held up his hand. "I am extendin' Sister Cordy's startin' time two more hours — so we can find out who murdered her husban' instid of her."

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"O.K." called a woman's voice, "go ahead and tell us the kind of skunk that done that!"

"Well, Madam, I would say it was a man who shot Jim Cancy."

"Oh, yes, we all know that," shouted several listeners. "Women don't shoot nobody, they pisen 'em . . . as a rule." "Go on, tell us somp'm else."

"Well, let me see," pondered Poggioli aloud. "Let us begin back with the forgery itself. Mrs. Cancy did this. She admits it. But she did not originate the idea, because that is a highly criminal idea and she does not have a highly criminal psychology. She has, in fact, a very religious and dutiful psychology. I also know that if she had been bright enough to think of tracing the will from her old love letters, she would have realized how dangerous they were to keep in her unlocked trunk and would have destroyed them immediately. Therefore, I know somebody suggested to her how she could forge the will."

More angry shouts interrupted here, as if the crowd were reaching for the real criminal. Some voices tried to hush the others so the psychologist could proceed. Eventually Poggioli went on.

"All right, Mrs. Cancy did not originate the idea of forgery. Then she was used as a tool. But she is not a hard, resolute woman. Just look at her there in the sheriff's car and you can see that. She is a soft, yielding woman and would not carry any plan through to its bitter end. But in her trial she did carry a plan through to its bitter end, and this end, odd to say, was to put a new roof on the Leatherwood church. Ladies and gentlemen, a new roof on Leatherwood church was the basic motive for Cancy's murder. It is fantastic, but it is the truth. Mrs. Cancy refused to hire a lawyer when she came to trial. Why? To save the money to put a roof on Leatherwood church. So the person who persuaded her to commit the forgery must also have persuaded her to withhold the money for the church roof, and that God would come down and set her free from the charge of murder."

At this the enthusiasm of the crowd knew no bounds. They flung up their hats, they yelled, they cried out that now the Lord had come to help Sister Cordy just like He had promised. The sheriff arose in his car and shouted that he extended Sister Cordy's leaving time for the rest of the day. He yelled that they were hot on the trail of the man who done it and he would remain in town to make the arrest.

I could see Poggioli was unnerved. It would take a cleverer psychologist than I am to explain why he should be. Of course, his demonstration was going awry. He was not getting where he had intended to go. He lifted up his hands and begged the crowd.

"My friends, please remember this. I do not know the man. I have no idea who he is. I can only give you his type."

"All right," shouted many voices,

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"go on and give us his type, so Sheriff Matheny can arrest him!"

The criminologist collected himself. "As to his type: I ate lunch in the Monarch café a little while ago and was reading an account of Mrs. Cancy's trial in your county paper. As I read, a gentleman beside me said that he had been watching strangers read the story of that trial for months, as it lay there on the lunch counter. It is possible such a man might have some connection with the murder; or he may have been morbidly curious about crime in general —"

Shouts of satisfaction here — "Go ahead, now you're gittin' somewhere!"

Poggioli stopped them. "Wait! Wait! I by no means incriminate this gentleman. I am trying to show you the various hypotheses which a criminologist must apply to every clue or piece of evidence."

"All right, Doctor, if he didn't kill Jim Cancy, who did?"

Poggioli mopped his face. "That I do not know, nor do I know anything whatever about the man in the café. I am simply trying to give you a possible psychological description of the murderer. Now, this man at my table also reprimanded my friend here for what he considered to be an infraction of a religious formality. In fact, he became quite angry about it. That would link up with the fact that Jim Cancy was reported to be a free-thinker. A free-thinker would have irritated such a man very deeply. If Cancy had jibed at this man's faith, the fellow would have felt that any punishment he could inflict on the mocker would be justified, even unto death. Also, he could have persuaded himself that any money he might receive from Cancy's death should be devoted to the welfare of the church — as for example, to put a new roof on the Leatherwood church. Following these plans, he could have easily influenced Mrs. Cancy to forge Cancy's will, with the understanding that the money would go to the church. Then he could have waylaid and shot Cancy, and made the will collectible. This would have accomplished two things; gratify his private revenge and make a contribution to the church. . . . The murderer could be of that type or he could be of a completely different type which I shall now try to analyze. . . ."

How many more types Poggioli would have described nobody knew, for at this juncture the sheriff discovered that his prisoner had fainted. This created a tremendous commotion. For a hill woman to faint was almost as unparalleled as for a horse to faint. Sheriff Matheny arose in his car and hallooed that he would carry no sick woman to the Nashville pen, and that Mrs. Cancy should remain here with her baby until she was completely recovered, even if it took a week. After making this announcement, the officer climbed out of his car and disappeared in the throng.

Everybody was gratified. They

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came pouring around Poggioli to congratulate him on his speech. A fat man elbowed up, seized Poggioli by the arm, motioned at me, too, and shouted at us to come to dinner in his hotel. Poggioli said we had just eaten at the Monarch café.

"Then you-all are bound to be hungry. Come on, my wife sent me over here to bring ye. She feeds all the revivalists and their singers who come to preach in the square."

The criminologist repeated that we were not hungry, but the fat man came close to him and said in what was meant for an undertone:

"Don't make no diff'runce whether you are hungry or not — my wife wants you to come inside while you and your buddy are alive!"

"Alive!" said my friend.

"Shore, alive. Do you think Deacon Sam Hawley will let any man stand up in the public square and accuse him of waylayin' Jim Cancy, and then not kill the man who does the accusin'?"

My friend was shocked. "Why, I never heard of Deacon Sam Hawley!"

"He's the man you et by, and he knows you. Come on, both of you!"

"But I was simply describing a type —"

"Brother, when you go to a city you find men in types — all dentists look alike, all bankers look alike, all lawyers look alike, and so on; but out here in these Tennessee hills we ain't got but one man to a type. And when you describe a man's type, you've described the man. Come on in to my hotel before you git shot. We're trying to make Lanesburg a summer resort and we don't want it to git a bad name for murderin' tourists."

We could see how a hotel owner would feel that way and we too were anxious to help preserve Lanesburg's reputation for peace and friendliness. We followed our host rather nervously to his hotel across the square and sat down to another lunch.

There was a big crowd in the hotel and they were all talking about the strange way the Lord had brought about the conviction of Deacon Sam Hawley, and rescued a comparatively innocent woman from an unjust sentence. Poggioli pointed out once or twice that the woman was not out of danger yet, but all the diners around us were quite sure that she soon would be.

The whole incident seemed about to end on a kind of unresolved anticlimax. The diners finally finished their meal and started out of the hotel. We asked some of the men if they thought it would be safe for us to go to our car. They said they didn't know, we would have to try it and see. Poggioli and I waited until quite a number of men and women were going out of the hotel and joined them. We were just well out on the sidewalk when a brisk gunfire broke out from behind the office of the *Lane County Weekly Herald*, which was just across the street from the hotel. It was not entirely unexpected. Besides, that sort of thing

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seemed to happen often enough in Lanesburg to create a pattern for public action. Everybody jumped behind everybody else, and holding that formation made for the nearest doors and alleys. At this point Sheriff Matheny began his counterattack. It was from a butcher's shop close to the hotel. How he knew what point to pick out, I don't know; whether or not he was using us for bait, I still don't know.

At any rate, the sheriff's fourth or fifth shot ended the battle. Our assailant, quite naturally, turned out to be Deacon Sam Hawley. He was dead when the crowd identified him. In the skirmish the sheriff was shot in the arm, and everybody agreed that now he would not be able to take Mrs. Cancy to the penitentiary for a good three months to come. She was reprieved at least for that long.

As we got into our car and drove out of Lanesburg, the crowd was circulating a petition to the Governor to pardon Mrs. Cordelia Cancy of the minor crime of forgery. The petition set forth Mrs. Cancy's charity, her purity of heart, her generosity in using the proceeds of her crime for the church, and a number of her other neighborly virtues. The village lawyer put in a note that a wife cannot forge her husband's signature. He argued that if she cannot steal from him, then she cannot forge his name, which is a form of theft. She simply signs his name for him, she does not forge it.

The petition was signed by two hundred and forty-three registered Democratic voters. The Governor of Tennessee is a Democrat.

At this point we drove out of Lanesburg . . .

A TWILIGHT ADVENTURE

by MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

It was a strange scene that we approached. Before a crossroad leading into a grove of beech trees, a man sat on his horse with a rifle across his saddle. He did not speak until we were before him in the road, and then his words were sinister.

"Ride on!" he said.

But my Uncle Abner did not ride on. He pulled up his big chestnut and looked calmly at the man facing him.

"You speak like one having authority," he said.

"Ride on, or you'll get into trouble!"

"I am accustomed to trouble," replied my uncle with great composure; "you must give me a better reason."

"I'll give you hell!" growled the man. "Ride on!"

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Abner's eyes traveled over the speaker with a deliberate scrutiny.

"It is not yours to give," he said, "although possibly to receive. Are the roads of Virginia held by arms?"

"This one is," replied the man.

"I think not," replied my Uncle Abner, and touching his horse with his heel, he turned into the crossroad.

The man seized his weapon, and I heard the hammer click under his thumb. Abner must have heard it, too, but he did not turn his broad back. He only called to me in his usual matter-of-fact voice:

"Go on, Martin; I will overtake you."

The man brought his gun up to his middle, but he did not shoot. He was like all those who undertake to command obedience without having first determined precisely what they will do if their orders are disregarded. He was prepared to threaten with desperate words, but not to support that threat with a desperate act, and he hung there uncertain, cursing under his breath.

I would have gone on as my uncle had told me to do, but now the man came to a decision.

"No, by God!" he said; "if he goes in, you go in, too!"

And he seized my bridle and turned my horse into the crossroad; then he followed.

There is a long twilight in these hills. The sun departs, but the day remains. A sort of weird, dim, elfin day, that dawns at sunset, and envelops and possesses the world. The land is full of light, but it is the light of no heavenly sun. It is a light equal everywhere, as though the earth strove to illumine itself, and succeeded with that labor.

The stars are not yet out. Now and then a pale moon rides in the sky, but it has no power, and the light is not from it. The wind is usually gone; the air is soft, and the fragrance of the fields fills it like a perfume. The noises of the day and of the creatures that go about by day cease, and the noises of the night and of the creatures that haunt the night begin. The bat swoops and circles in the maddest action, but without a sound. The eye sees him, but the ear hears nothing. The whip-poorwill begins his plaintive cry, and one hears, but does not see.

It is a world that we do not understand, for we are creatures of the sun, and we are fearful lest we come upon things at work here of which we have no experience, and that may be able to justify themselves against our reason. And so a man falls into silence when he travels in this twilight, and he looks and listens with his senses out on guard.

It was an old wagon-road that we entered, with the grass growing between the ruts. The horses traveled without a sound until we began to enter a grove of ancient beech trees; then the dead leaves cracked and rustled. Abner did not look behind him, and so he did not know that I came. He knew that someone followed, but he doubtless took it for the sentinel in the road.

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The man with the cocked gun rode grimly behind me. I did not know whither we went or to what end. We might be shot down from behind a tree or murdered in our saddles. It was not a land where men took desperate measures upon a triviality. And I knew that Abner rode into something that little men, lacking courage and heart, would gladly have stayed out of.

Presently my ear caught a sound, or, rather, a confused mingling of sounds, as of men digging in the earth. It was faint, and some distance beyond us in the heart of the beech woods, but as we traveled the sound increased and I could distinguish the strokes of the mattock, and the thrust of the shovel and the clatter of the earth on the dry leaves.

These sounds seemed at first to be before us, and then, a little later, off on our right hand. And finally, through the gray boles of the beech trees in the lowland, I saw two men at work digging a pit. They had just begun their work, for there was little earth thrown out. But there was a great heap of leaves that they had cleared away, and heavy cakes of the baked crust that the mattocks had pried up. The length of the pit lay at right angles to the road, and the men were working with their backs toward us. They were in their shirts and trousers, and the heavy mottled shadows thrown by the beech limbs hovered on their backs and shoulders like a flock of night birds. The earth was baked and hard; the mattock rang on it, and among the noises of their work they did not hear us.

I saw Abner look off at this strange labor, his head half turned, but he did not stop and we went on. The old wagon-road made a turn into the low ground. I heard the sound of horses, and a moment later we came upon a dozen men.

I shall not easily forget that scene. The beech trees had been deadened by some settler who had chopped a ring around them, and they stood gaunt with a few tattered leaves, letting the weird twilight in. Some of the men stood about, others sat on the fallen trees, and others in their saddles. But upon every man of that grim company there was the air and aspect of one who waits for something to be finished.

An old man with a heavy iron-gray beard smoked a pipe, puffing out great mouthfuls of smoke with a sort of deliberate energy; another whittled a stick, cutting a bull with horns, and shaping his work with the nicest care; and still another traced letters on the pommel of his saddle with his thumb-nail.

A little to one side a great pronged beech thrust out a gray arm, and under it two men sat on their horses, their elbows strapped to their bodies and their mouths gagged with a saddle-cloth. And behind them a man in his saddle was working with a colt halter, unraveling the twine that bound the headpiece and seeking thereby to get a greater length of rope.

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This was the scene when I caught it first. But a moment later, when my uncle rode into it, the thing burst into furious life. Men sprang up, caught his horse by the bit and covered him with weapons. Someone called for the sentinel who rode behind me, and he galloped up. For a moment there was confusion. Then the big man who had smoked with such deliberation called out my uncle's name, others repeated it, and the panic was gone. But a ring of stern, determined faces were around him and before his horse, and with the passing of the flash of action there passed no whit of the grim purpose upon which these men were set.

My uncle looked about him.

"Lemuel Arnold," he said; "Nicholas Vance, Hiram Ward, you here!"

As my uncle named these men I knew them. They were cattle grazers. Ward was the big man with the pipe. The men with them were their renters and drovers.

Their lands lay nearest to the mountains. The geographical position made for feudal customs and a certain independence of action. They were on the border, they were accustomed to say, and had to take care of themselves. And it ought to be written that they did take care of themselves with courage and decision, and on occasion they also took care of Virginia.

Their fathers had pushed the frontier of the dominion northward and westward and had held the land. They had fought the savage single-handed and desperately, by his own methods and with his own weapons. Ruthless and merciless, eye for eye and tooth for tooth, they returned what they were given.

They did not send to Virginia for militia when the savage came; they fought him at their doors, and followed him through the forest, and took their toll of death. They were hardier than he was, and their hands were heavier and bloodier, until the old men in the tribes of the Ohio Valley forbade these raids because they cost too much, and turned the war parties south into Kentucky.

Certain historians have written severely of these men and their ruthless methods, and prattled of humane warfare; but they wrote nursing their soft spines in the security of a civilization which these men's hands had builded, and their words are hollow.

"Abner," said Ward, "let me speak plainly. We have got an account to settle with a couple of cattle thieves and we are not going to be interfered with. Cattle stealing and murder have got to stop in these hills. We've had enough of it."

"Well," replied my uncle, "I am the last man in Virginia to interfere with that. We have all had enough of it, and we are all determined that it must cease. But how do you propose to end it?"

"With a rope," said Ward.

"It is a good way," replied Abner, "when it is done the right way."

"What do you mean by the right way?" said Ward.

"I mean," answered my uncle,

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"that we have all agreed to a way and we ought to stick to our agreement. Now, I want to help you to put down cattle stealing and murder, but I want also to keep my word."

"And how have you given your word?"

"In the same way that you have given yours," said Abner, "and as every man here has given his. Our fathers found out that they could not manage the assassin and the thief when every man undertook to act for himself, so they got together and agreed upon a certain way to do these things. Now, we have indorsed what they agreed to, and promised to obey it, and I for one would like to keep my promise."

The big man's face was puzzled. Now it cleared.

"Hell!" he said. "You mean the law?"

"Call it what you like," replied Abner; "it is merely the agreement of everybody to do certain things in a certain way."

The man made a decisive gesture with a jerk of his head.

"Well," he said, "we're going to do this thing our own way."

My uncle's face became thoughtful.

"Then," he said, "you will injure some innocent people."

"You mean these two blacklegs, Shifflet and Twiggs?"

And Ward indicated the prisoners.

My uncle lifted his face and looked at the two men some distance away beneath the great beech, as though he had but now observed them.

"I was not thinking of them," he answered. "I was thinking that if men like you and Lemuel Arnold and Nicholas Vance violate the law, lesser men will follow your example, and as you justify your act for security, they will justify theirs for revenge and plunder. And so the law will go to pieces and a lot of weak and innocent people who depend upon it for security will be left unprotected."

These were words that I have remembered, because they put the danger of lynch law in a light I had not thought of. But I saw that they would not move these determined men. Their blood was up and they received them coldly.

"Abner," said Ward, "we are not going to argue this thing with you. There are times when men have to take the law into their own hands. We live here at the foot of the mountains. Our cattle are stolen and run across the border into Maryland. We are tired of it and we intend to stop it. Our lives and our property are menaced by a set of reckless desperate devils that we have determined to hunt down and hang to the first tree in sight. We did not send for you. You pushed your way in here; and now, if you are afraid of breaking the law, you can ride on, because we are going to break it — if to hang a pair of murderous devils is to break it."

I was astonished at my uncle's decision.

"Well," he said, "if the law must be broken, I will stay and help you break it!"

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"Very well," replied Ward; "but don't get a wrong notion in your head, Abner. If you choose to stay, you put yourself on a footing with everybody else."

"And that is precisely what I want to do," replied Abner, "but as matters stand now, every man here has an advantage over me."

"What advantage, Abner?" said Ward.

"The advantage," answered my uncle, "that he has heard all the evidence against your prisoners and is convinced that they are guilty."

"If that is all the advantage, Abner," replied Ward, "you shall not be denied it. There has been so much cattle stealing here of late that our people living on the border finally got together and determined to stop every drove going up into the mountains that wasn't accompanied by somebody that we knew was all right. This afternoon one of my men reported a little bunch of about a hundred steers on the road, and I stopped it. These two men were driving the cattle. I inquired if the cattle belonged to them and they replied that they were not the owners, but that they had been hired to take the drove over into Maryland. I did not know the men, and as they met my inquiries with oaths and imprecations, I was suspicious of them. I demanded the name of the owner who had hired them to drive the cattle. They said it was none of my damned business and went on. I raised the county. We overtook them, turned their cattle into a field, and brought them back until we could find out who the drove belonged to. On the road we met Bowers."

He turned and indicated the man who was working with the rope halter.

I knew the man. He was a cattle shipper, somewhat involved in debt, but who managed to buy and sell and somehow keep his head above water.

"He told us the truth. Yesterday evening he had gone over on the Stone-Coal to look at Daniel Coopman's cattle. He had heard that some grazer from your county, Abner, was on the way up to buy the cattle for stockers. He wanted to get in ahead of your man, so he left home that evening and got to Coopman's place about sundown. He took a short cut on foot over the hill, and when he came out he saw a man on the opposite ridge, where the road runs, ride away. The man seemed to have been sitting on his horse looking down into the little valley where Coopman's house stands. Bowers went down to the house, but Coopman was not there. The door was open, and Bowers says the house looked as though Coopman had just gone out of it and might come back any moment. There was no one about, because Coopman's wife had gone on a visit to her daughter, over the mountains, and the old man was alone.

"Bowers thought Coopman was out showing the cattle to the man whom he had just seen ride off, so he went out to the pasture field to look for him. He could not find him and he

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could not find the cattle. He came back to the house to wait until Coopman should come in. He sat down on the porch. As he sat there he noticed that the porch had been scrubbed and was still wet. He looked at it and saw that it had been scrubbed only at one place before the door. This seemed to him a little peculiar, and he wondered why Coopman had scrubbed his porch only in one place. He got up and as he went toward the door he saw that the jamb of the door was splintered at a point about halfway up. He examined this splintered place and presently discovered that it was a bullet hole.

"This alarmed him, and he went out into the yard. There he saw a wagon track leading away from the house toward the road. In the weeds he found Coopman's watch. He picked it up and put it into his pocket. It was a big silver watch, with Coopman's name on it, and attached to it was a buckskin string. He followed the track to the gate, where it entered the road. He discovered then that the cattle had also passed through this gate. It was now night. Bowers went back, got Coopman's saddle horse out of the stable, rode him home, and followed the track of the cattle this morning, but he saw no trace of the drove until we met him."

"What did Shifflet and Twiggs say to this story?" inquired Abner.

"They did not hear it," answered Ward; "Bowers did not talk before them."

"Did Shifflet and Twiggs know Bowers?" said Abner.

"I don't know," replied Ward; "their talk was so foul when we stopped the drove that we had to tie their mouths up."

"Is that all?" said Abner.

Ward swore a great oath.

"No!" he said. "Do you think we would hang men on that? From what Bowers told us, we thought Shifflet and Twiggs had killed Daniel Coopman and driven off his cattle; but we wanted to be certain of it, so we set out to discover what they had done with Coopman's body after they had killed him and what they had done with the wagon. We followed the trail of the drove down to the Valley River. No wagon had crossed, but on the other side we found that a wagon and a drove of cattle had turned out of the road and gone along the basin of the river for about a mile through the woods. And there in a bend of the river we found where these devils had camped.

"There had been a great fire of logs very near to the river, but none of the ashes of this fire remained. From a circular space some twelve feet in diameter the ashes had all been shoveled off, the marks of the shovel being distinct. In the center of the place where this fire had burned, the ground had been scraped clean, but near the edges there were some traces of cinders and the ground was blackened. In the river at this point, just opposite the remains of the fire, was a natural washout or hole. We made a raft of logs, cut a pole with a fork on the end, and dragged the river. We found most

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of the wagon iron, all showing the effect of fire. Then we fastened a tin bucket to a pole and fished the washout. We brought up cinders, buttons, buckles, and pieces of bone."

Ward paused.

"That settled it, and we came back here to swing the devils up."

My uncle had listened very carefully, and now he spoke.

"What did the man pay Twiggs and Shifflet?" said my uncle. "Did they tell you that when you stopped the drove?"

"Now that," answered Ward, "was another piece of damning evidence. When we searched the men we found a pocketbook on Shifflet with a hundred and fifteen dollars and some odd cents. It was Daniel Coopman's pocketbook, because there was an old tax receipt in it that had slipped down between the leather and the lining. We asked Shifflet where he got it, and he said that the fifteen dollars and the change was his own money and that the hundred had been paid to him by the man who had hired them to drive the cattle. He explained his possession of the pocketbook by saying that this man had the money in it, and when he went to pay them he said that they might just as well take it with them, too."

"Who was this man?" said Abner.

"They will not tell who he was."

"Why not?"

"Now, Abner," cried Ward, "why not, indeed! Because there never was any such man. The story is a lie out of the whole cloth. Those two devils are guilty as hell. The proof is all dead against them."

"Well," replied my uncle, "what circumstantial evidence proves depends a good deal on how you get started. It is a somewhat dangerous road to the truth, because all the signboards have a curious trick of pointing in the direction that you are going. Now, a man will never realize this unless he turns around and starts back, then he will see, to his amazement that the signboards have also turned. But as long as his face is set one certain way, it is of no use to talk to him, he won't listen to you; and if he sees you going the other way, he will call you a fool."

"There is only one way in this case," said Ward.

"There are always two ways in every case," replied Abner, "that the suspected person is either guilty or innocent. You have started upon the theory that Shifflet and Twiggs are guilty. Now, suppose you had started the other way, what then?"

"Well," said Ward, "what then?"

"This, then," continued Abner. "You stop Shifflet and Twiggs on the road with Daniel Coopman's cattle, and they tell you that a man has hired them to drive this drove into Maryland. You believe that and start out to find the man. You find Bowers!"

Bowers went deadly white.

"For God's sake, Abner!" he said.

But my uncle was merciless and he drove in the conclusion.

"What then?"

There was no answer, but the faces

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of the men about my uncle turned toward the man whose trembling hands fingered the rope that he was preparing for others.

"But the things we found, Abner?" said Ward.

"What do they prove," continued my uncle, "now that the sign boards are turned? That somebody killed Daniel Coopman and drove off his cattle, and afterward destroyed the body and the wagon in which it was hauled away. . . . But who did that? . . . The men who were driving Daniel Coopman's cattle, or the man who was riding Daniel Coopman's horse, and carrying Daniel Coopman's watch in his pocket?"

Ward's face was a study in expression.

"Ah!" cried Abner. "Remember that the signboards have turned about. And what do they point to if we read them on the way we are going now? The man who killed Coopman was afraid to be found with the cattle, so he hired Twiggs and Shifflet to drive them into Maryland for him and follows on another road."

"But his story, Abner?" said Ward.

"And what of it?" replied my uncle. "He is taken and he must explain how he comes by the horse that he rides, and the watch that he carries, and he must find the criminal. Well, he tells you a tale to fit the facts that you will find when you go back to look, and he gives you Shifflet and Twiggs to hang."

I never saw a man in more mortal terror than Jacob Bowers.

"My God!" he said, and again he repeated it, and again.

And he had cause for that terror on him. My uncle was stern and ruthless. The pendulum had swung the other way, and the lawless monster that Bowers had allied was now turning on himself. He saw it and his joints were unhinged with fear.

A voice crashed out of the ring of desperate men, uttering the changed opinion.

"By God!" it cried, "we've got the right man now."

And one caught the rope out of Bowers's hand.

But my Uncle Abner rode in on them.

"Are you sure about that?" he said.

"Sure!" they echoed. "You have shown it yourself, Abner."

"No," replied my uncle, "I have not shown it. I have shown merely whither circumstantial evidence leads us when we go hotfoot after a theory. Bowers says that there was a man on the hill above Daniel Coopman's house, and this man will know that he did not kill Daniel Coopman and that his story is the truth."

They laughed in my uncle's face.

"Do you believe that there was any such person?"

My uncle seemed to increase in stature, and his voice became big and dominant.

"I do," he said, "because I am the man!"

They had got their lesson, and we rode out with Shifflet and Twiggs to a legal trial.

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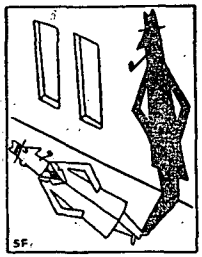
EVERY DOG MUST HAVE HIS DAY



At the time of this writing — in the year of our Lord 1949 — there are still some well-known and well-beloved American detectives who have yet to be born in the short-story form. At least two world-famous sleuths of fiction are beyond the possibility of short-story birth: Charlie Chan will never quote Confucius because his creator, Earl Derr Biggers, has long since joined his illustrious ancestors; and Philo Vance will never quote the Encyclopedia Britannica because his creator, S. S. Van Dine, has shuffled off this man-hunting coil. At least three other eminent investigators can still come into being in short tales — their sires are still happily with us: Nick Charles can yet chase facts and females — if Dashiell Hammett emerges from retirement; Perry Mason can yet practise courtroom criminology — if Erle Stanley Gardner so decrees; and Nero Wolfe can guzzle beer, raise orchids, and snort "Pfui" — if Rex Stout so dictates. It is curious that the last two do exist in novelettes — but even short novelettes cannot legitimately be called short stories. It is curious too that all five famous ferrets exist in radio adventures — but stories in play form cannot be legitimately called short stories.

And there are other popular private eyes who, for reasons known only to their inventors, shun the short-story form despite its noble birth — for no one can deny that the short story is detection's first form, original form, oldest form, and purest form. We have yet to meet Philip Marlowe in a Raymond Chandler short story, and so far as we know Frank Gruber's best-known detective, Johnny Fletcher, wriggles in and out of financial difficulties only in stories of novel length.

Which brings us to this strange, perhaps unique, situation: if there is no Nick Charles short story, there is obviously no short tale of Nick's everloving wife, Nora; if there is no Nero Wolfe short story, there is obviously no short adventure of Nero Wolfe's brash assistant, Archie Goodwin; if there is no Perry Mason short story, there is obviously no short case about Perry Mason's girl Friday, Della Street. You would say, therefore, if Johnny Fletcher cannot be read in short-story form, his sidekick Sam Cragg is equally non-existent in a short escapade. But it is the old axiom of no rule being so general which admits not some exception: here is Sam Cragg neck-deep in murder and mayhem, all on his own, positively solo, and not even the shadow of Johnny Fletcher offstage.

Yes, every detective must have his day . . .

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1000-TO-1 FOR YOUR MONEY

by FRANK GRUBER

TO LOOK at me reading the death notices while I'm having my breakfast in Thompson's, you'd think I was an undertaker. I'm not, but my job is just as cheerful. Take this business today. I've got a bunch of cards with names, and I'm comparing them with the names in the death notices. I do this every morning and about twice a year I find a name I'm looking for. I strike pay-dirt this morning with the name Druhar.

I finish my breakfast and go out and hunt for my jaloppy, which I've got parked a couple of blocks down the street. I climb in and head for the North Side; 598 Blackhawk Street.

These foreigners certainly bury them early in the morning. Although it's only nine thirty, they've already taken the crepe down from the door. There are a couple of kids hanging around and I ask them: "At what church are they having the mass for Mrs. Druhar?"

"St. John's on Cleveland Avenue," one of the kids replies.

I miss them at the church, so the only thing I can do is go out to the cemetery, which, according to the paper, is St. Sebastian's, seven miles outside the city limits. It takes me about an hour to get out there, so when I get to the cemetery, they're breaking up; going back to the cars that have brought them out. I grab an old envelope out of my pocket and wave it around as if it's a telegram, or something.

"Mr. Tony Druhar!" I yell.

A big fellow, who is just about to climb into a green sedan, says: "Here I am."

I run over and see that the license number on the sedan checks with the number on one of my cards. So I pull out the old repossess warrant and stick it into Mr. Druhar's hand. "Sorry, Mr. Druhar," I say. "I'm taking your car, on account of you haven't done right by the Mid-West Finance Company."

This Druhar looks stupidly at the piece of paper in his hand for a minute. Then he lets out a roar you could have heard over on Grant Avenue. "Why, you grave-robbing ——! Is this a time to pull something like this, when I have just buried my poor grandmother?"

"That's how I found you," I tell him. "It says in the paper: 'Mourned by her sons, so-and-so, and grandsons, Tony Druhar, and so-and-so.' It was easy."

Some people certainly get mad. This Druhar fellow jumps up and down and takes off his coat and throws it on the ground and jumps on it. Then three fellows just as big as Dru-

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har climb out of his sedan and surround me.

"So you're a skip-tracer!" one of them says, and lets a handful of knuckles fly in my direction.

I'm lucky enough to duck them, but I can see that this isn't the safest place in the world right now for Sam Cragg. I get a lucky break, though. A motorcycle cop who's escorted the funeral out here is just a little way off, and when Druhar starts all his yelling, he comes over.

"What's the trouble?" he asks.

Druhar starts swearing again, but I grab hold of the cop's arm. "I've got a repossess warrant for this car. This Druhar has missed six payments, and the Mid-West Finance Company wants $188 or the car."

The cop gives me a funny look and takes the warrant from Tony Druhar. He looks at it and then he looks at me. "I'll bet you hate yourself, mister, when you look at your face in the mirror every morning."

"Maybe I do," I tell the cop, "but if I didn't have this job somebody else would, and brother, I have to eat."

"Why?" asks the cop.

I can see he's all on the other side, so I give him some law. "Officer, this is a regular warrant, good anywhere in this country. As an officer of the law, I'm calling on you to see that it's properly served. I want this car or $188."

There's some hullabaloo, but after a while Druhar and his pals get together and make me a proposition, which I am sap enough to accept. I'm a softie, and you oughtn't to be a skip-tracer if you are a softie. They've pooled up $32 and they say that Druhar will have the rest of the money for me tomorrow. I'm just cagy enough, though, to make them all give me their names and addresses and prove them by letters and stuff they've got with them.

That's where I made my big mistake, and how I got mixed up with the phoney prince.

Next morning I drive up to 736 Gardner Street. Gardner Street is a little one-block chopped-up street that has been dumped in between Stanton Park and Ogden Avenue. There are only about thirty houses on the street, and everyone of them should have been condemned twenty years ago. Druhar is supposed to live on the first floor of one of these dumps.

I can't ring the doorbell because there isn't a doorbell, so I bang the door with my fist. Nothing happens, so I bang it again. Then I figure I have been given the runaround and I get sore, and push on the door. It goes open and I walk into the place. Druhar is at home. He's lying on the floor.

He's dead.

For a minute I look down at him and all sorts of cold shivers run up and down my back. This Druhar is a big fellow, but somebody has twisted his neck so that his face is looking over his shoulder.

There's a slip of paper sticking out of Druhar's pants pocket. I don't like corpses any better than the next fellow, but I reach down and pull out

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this piece of paper. And then my eyes pop out. The paper reads:

For value received I promise to pay to Tony Druhar, Five Thousand Dollars.

W. C. Roberts.

A promissory note, good in any man's court, if this W. C. Roberts has got $5000.

I look at the thing and finally stick it in my pocket. After all, Tony Druhar, dead or alive, owes the Mid-West Finance Company about $156.

I back out of the house and I'm on the porch when I see the taxicab that is pulled up behind my jaloppy. The prince is coming across the sidewalk.

Of course I don't know that he's a prince then. I find that out later. But he certainly dresses the part. He's wearing a black, single-breasted coat, which is open, showing a fawn-colored waistcoat. Under it is a pair of striped trousers and below that, believe it or not, white spats. On his head he's got a pearl-gray Homburg. He's carrying a pair of yellow pigskin gloves and a cane.

"Good morning, sir," he says to me in a voice that drips with some foreign accent. His face is long and very sad and aristocratic. "I'm looking for Mr. Druhar."

What I want to do is jump into my jaloppy and get out of there, but I know how cops are, and it's just my luck that either the prince or the taxicab driver will remember the license number of my car; so I figure I may as well face the thing out.

"Mr. Druhar," I say, "is inside the house. He's dead."

The prince's mouth falls open, but only for a second. Then he reaches into his waistcoat and brings out a monocle and sticks it in his eye. He looks at me and says, "I do not understand."

"Maybe he doesn't either, but he's dead just the same."

He lets out a sigh. "That is too bad. I am Prince Peter Strogovich. This Druhar had applied to me for a position, and I was just about to employ him. It is sad."

The prince takes the monocle out of his eye and polishes it with his gloves. "You say he is inside? The police do not yet know?"

They know soon enough. Some of the neighbors have been attracted by the triple event — my jaloppy, the taxicab, and the prince in his fancy outfit. They have gathered and they've heard some of our talk, so there's a lot of chattering and running around.

In about five minutes a squad car rolls up. In a few minutes more there are ten or twelve cops around, an ambulance, and the emergency squad from the Fire Department.

There's a lot of excitement and when it all sifts down, the prince and myself are down at Headquarters, and Captain Riordan is asking a lot of questions.

"I don't like your story at all," he tells me. "You were pretty sore at this Druhar. According to the neighbors, and his friends, you cut a pretty scene

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yesterday at the funeral of his grandmother. My idea is that you went there this morning to collect the money and you got into a fight with him."

"Wait a minute, Captain," I cut in. "Call up Oscar Berger, who's the Berger Adjustment Agency. Ask him if I've killed any of my skips before."

"There's always a time to start, you know."

The captain grunts and picks up the telephone. He calls the office and says, "Hello, Mr. Berger? This is Police Headquarters. I've got a man here by the name of Sam Cragg who says he works for you. . . . What's the charge? Why, he said he was after a fellow who owed some money and it seems that the fellow got his neck twisted. What?" He listens for a minute, then he turns to me. "He wants to know if you collected the money."

I give the captain my opinion of Oscar Berger, which the captain translates into "No." He listens a minute more and then says, "O.K.," and hangs up.

"Berger says he fired you a couple days ago."

I really get sore then. That was about the kind of loyalty you can expect from a man who'd run that kind of collection agency.

Prince Peter comes to my assistance. "Captain, I do not think this man killed Mr. Druhar. I do not think he is strong enough to do it. Besides, there are no marks on him, and Mr. Druhar would not have submitted without fighting."

"I could figure that out myself," snaps the captain. "He could have come on Druhar from the back and caught him by surprise."

The prince shrugs. "At any rate, you are not going to hold me? I have important matters. . . ."

"You can go," says the captain. He scowls at me. "I still don't like your story, but I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt. If I find out anything more, I can pick you up easily enough."

That's enough for me. I get out of Headquarters as quickly as I can. Outside, Prince Peter is just climbing into a taxicab.

I get a street car and ride back to Gardner Street where the jaloppy is still parked. It's there all right, only it hasn't got any tires or headlights now. The crooks in the neighborhood have stripped them off.

When I start swearing, even the kids on the street duck into the houses. I've got a good mind to leave the rest of the junk right there, but when I get to Division Street I go into a saloon and telephone a garage.

By the time I get down to the rattletrap building on Wells Street where BAA has its offices, I'm in a swell mood — for murder.

I slam into the office and Betty Marshall, who practically runs the business from the inside, gives me the ha-ha. "So you finally landed in jail!"

"And it's no thanks to our boss that I'm not still there. Is he inside?"

He's trying to lock his office door, when I push it open and knock him

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halfway across the room. "Listen, Berger," I says to him, "what kind of a doublecrosser are you?"

He ducks behind the desk. "Now take it easy, Cragg. I was just going to call my lawyer and have him spring you."

"I'll bet you were! Every day of the week I do things for you that keep me awake nights, and that's the kind of loyalty you give me."

"Now, now, Sam," he soft-soaps me. "I got a nice bunch of easy skips for you. To make it up, I'll pay you the regular five-buck rate on them, although these are so easy you oughtn't to get more than three. It's the new account I landed, the O. W. Sugar Jewelry Company."

"You call those easy skips? Why, three-fourths of the people that buy jewelry on the installment plan pawn it before they finish paying for it!"

"Yeah, but they're all working people in the lower brackets. You've just got to find out where they work and threaten to garnishee their wages and they'll kick in."

I take the cards he gives me and get started.

These Sugar Jewelry skips are no better or worse than others I've handled. I find the first one, a middle-aged Italian woman, cracking pecans in a little dump near Oak and Milton — the Death Corner. She gets eight cents a pound for shelling the pecans and if she works hard she can shell two pounds an hour. Why a woman like that ever bought a wrist watch I don't know, but she did — and I make her promise to pay a dollar a week on the watch.

I am working on the second skip on Sedgwick near Division, when I get the surprise of my life. Prince Pete Strogovich, cane and white spats and all, comes out of a little confectionery store. I step into a doorway and watch him saunter across the street and go into a saloon. Then I walk into the confectionery store. It's a dump; dirty showcases, stationery, candy boxes, and empty soft-drink bottles standing all around. There's a magazine rack on one side.

Next to it sits the biggest woman I've ever seen in my life. She's six feet one or two inches tall and big all around. She weighs two-ninety or three hundred, and none of it is flabby fat.

"What can I do for you?" she asks, her voice a hoarse bass.

I pretend not to hear her and start pawing over the magazines.

"Can I help you?" she goes on. "What magazines are you looking for?"

I make up the name of a dick mag.

"I don't carry that one, but there's plenty of detective magazines, just as good."

"They're not just as good," I retort. "That's the trouble with you storekeepers. You're always trying to sell something you say is just as good."

She starts panting like she has the asthma and I give her a look. Her eyes are slits in her fat cheeks, but they're glittering slits. She's good and sore.

"Get out of here!" she snaps at me.

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She starts getting up from the big reinforced chair and I beat it to the door.

When I get outside, Prince Peter's coming out of the saloon, dabbing a handkerchief to his aristocratic mouth. I walk across the street and meet him on the corner.

"Hi, Pete!" I say to him.

He knows me all right. But he isn't overjoyed to meet me. "What are you doing here?" he asks.

"Nothin' much, Pete, just trying to locate a skip."

"Skip?" he asks. "What is a skip?"

"Well, suppose you buy a suit of clothes on the installment plan, or a diamond ring or a car. You try to beat the firm out of the money and move without leaving a forwarding address. A skip-tracer runs you down and hands you a summons. That's me."

"Then you are a detective, no?"

"Well, I do detective work, all right, but I'm not exactly a detective."

"So!" The prince gets out his monocle and begins polishing it on his gloves. He's sizing me up. After a minute he decides I'm O.K. "My friend, would you do a job for me? For two weeks I have been looking for a man and I cannot find him. He — he owes me some money, just like your skips. You think, perhaps, you can find him?"

"Probably, but you see, I work for a collection agency and I only look for people they want."

"But I would pay you well. Here!" He whips out a leather wallet and pulls out a couple of bills. Fifties. I take them from his hand and rub them. "You're paying me a hundred dollars to find this man for you?"

"One hundred dollars now. When you find him I give you four hundred dollars more. You work for me, huh?"

I fold the bills four ways and put them into my pocket. Berger Adjustment Agency pays me five dollars for finding a skip. Sometimes I find two in one day. Sometimes I don't find two in a week.

"What's this fellow's name?"

"Roberts," the prince says, "W. C. Roberts."

I don't tumble right away, not until the prince says: "He owes me five thousand dollars. He has give me the note and promise to pay. . . ."

And then I know. W. C. Roberts is the name on Tony Druhar's note, the one I'd slipped out of his pocket and had in my own right now. I say: "What was the last address you had of this Roberts, and what does he look like?"

"I do not know what he looks like," the prince says. "But his last address is — was," he pulls a tiny notebook from his pocket, "518 Rookery Building."

I write the address down on a card.

"He isn't there any more, I take it."

"No, he have moved and not give the new address. But you find him?"

"For five hundred bucks I'd find John Wilkes Booth," I tell him.

"Booth? I do not know him."

"Never mind. And where'll I find you?"

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He thinks that over before giving me the answer. "At the Gregorian Towers on Michigan Boulevard."

I write that down, too, then I ask him the question that's been bothering me for a long time. "Say, Prince, would you mind telling me what nationality you are?"

He likes that. He pulls himself up straight and sticks the monocle in his eye. "I am Serbian," he says proudly. "My cousin was the king of Serbia. King Peter Karageorgovich."

Me, I don't even know where Serbia is. The name's vaguely familiar, but that's about all. I make up my mind to look it up some time.

I leave the prince and get on a south-bound Sedgwick Street car, but at Chicago Avenue it moves too slow and I get off and grab a cab. I have a hundred bucks and I want to see what it's like to spend money.

The Rookery Building is one of those old office buildings that was built right after the war — the Civil War. One of these days they're going to tear it down and use the ground as a parking lot.

I go straight to the superintendent's office. "I'm looking for a Mr. W. C. Roberts, who used to have an office in this building," I say to him.

"Is that so?" The supe comes back at me. "Some other people are looking for him, too — including the cops."

"Ha, the cops! And why're they looking for him?"

"You ain't never heard of W. C. Roberts, mister?"

"What'd he do, kill someone?"

"Uh-uh." He gives me a funny look, then reaches into his pocket and brings out a slip of paper. He hands it to me and I look at it. It has some writing on it:

For value received I promise to pay to William Kilduff, five thousand dollars.

W. C. Roberts.

I pull out my own note — the one made out to Tony Druhar. I show it to the superintendent. "Hello, sucker," says the superintendent. "How much you pay for yours?"

I stall. "The usual amount, I guess."

"Five bucks?"

"Ten."

"You *are* a sucker. Us Irish only paid five. I heard that some of those Serbians paid as high as twenty bucks."

"Oh," I say, not knowing what this was all about, "so it depends on the nationality how big a sucker you are?"

"Yeah, sure. Most of us Irish know now we got gypped. But those Serbians — I hear they're still going for it. They refuse to believe that Roberts is a crook. That phoney prince keeps them bulled."

"Prince? You mean Prince Peter Strogovich?"

"Yeah, the guy with the fancy duds," he says.

"He claims to be a Serbian prince." I laugh. "I'll bet he gives his fellow countrymen a good line. Like to hear him some time."

"Why don't you go to one of their meetings, then? I think tonight is the

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Serbians' night. They hold their meeting at some hall on Halsted Street, near North Avenue."

"Say, what's this Roberts guy look like?" I ask.

"That's the funny part of it. No one knows. He never came to his office here. A dame ran it for him. When the cops came in one day, she just went out and never came back."

"Cagy, huh? Well, so long, sucker!"

"So long, sucker!"

When I get out of the Rookery Building I walk over to Adams Street and go into a saloon and have two good hookers of rye. I need them. This set-up is the screwiest I've ever run across in all my life.

Promissory notes, five bucks apiece. . . . Serbians.

I have another snort, then go back to the office of BAA, on Wells near Randolph. Betty has just come from getting her hair done. I give it the once-over. "Like it?" she asked.

It's set in the new up-and-at-'em style. "You dames get screwier every day," I tell her.

"Is that so?" she says, coldly. "Well, it's a good thing I didn't get my hair done for *you*."

It's an idea I haven't thought about before, but I make a mental note of it. Inside his private office Oscar Berger rubs his hands together.

"Well, how many did you find?"

"One, but I got some good leads on two more."

"Only one, and such good prospects!"

"Nuts, Berger," I say to him. "They're as tough as any others and you know it. Look, tell me something: ever hear of a crook by the name of W. C. Roberts?"

"Yeah, sure. Haven't you? But maybe that case broke when you were on your vacation."

"It must have. What'd Roberts do?"

"Nothing much. Except swindle about five thousand Serbians in this man's town. He's an inventor, see, or claims to be one. He gets a bunch of these Serbians together and tells them he invented four-wheel brakes for automobiles, but the big car companies swiped the patent from him. So what? So he wants to sue the companies. But lawsuits cost money and that's what he hasn't got much of. So he gets the Serbians to finance the lawsuits. Mr. Roberts gives them notes. They lend him ten bucks now, they get five thousand when he collects from the big shots."

"How much does he collect?"

Berger screws up his mouth. "Ten or fifteen million. Boxcar numbers."

"And the chumps fall for it?"

"They like it! According to the papers, ten or fifteen thousand Serbians kicked in from five to a hundred bucks per each."

"And Roberts skipped?"

"Wouldn't you?"

"That depends. If the suckers were milked dry, maybe. But I understand there's a lot of Bulgarians and Serbians and such who still believe in Roberts."

"Oh, sure, that's the sweet part of it. Roberts warned them even before

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the law jumped on him that he was expecting something like that. On account of the big companies owning the cops and sicking them on him. Slick guy, this Roberts."

"Yeah? What'd he look like?"

"That's the funny part of it. No one knows. He doesn't show himself. When the cops tried to get him, they discovered that no one would even admit ever having seen him."

"Not bad," I say, "not bad at all."

Oscar Berger gives me the once-over. "What's your interest in this? Roberts didn't put the bite into you, did he?"

"No. When someone offers me over four per cent interest I know he's crooked. Not that I'd ever get enough to invest at four per cent."

When I come out of Berger's office, Betty is putting lipstick on her mouth. "All right, sister," I say to her, "I'm going to give you a break tonight. Where do you live?"

"At 4898 Winthrop, but if you come up you're traveling just for the exercise."

"I like exercise," I tell her. "I'll be there at seven."

"I won't be home. . . . What'll I wear?"

Nice, girl, Betty. "Nothing fancy. We'll go to some quiet spot."

I still have the best part of my hundred bucks the Serbian prince had given me. I get a haircut and a shave and have a bite at Harding's Grill on Madison. Then I take a taxi to 4898 Winthrop Avenue, which is a block north of Lawrence and one east of Broadway.

The place is a second-rate apartment hotel. They won't let me upstairs without being announced and when I get Betty on the phone she says she'll be right down.

She's down in five minutes. I almost don't recognize her. She's wearing a silver evening dress that must have cost her at least a month's pay. Her hair's brushed soft and shiny.

She certainly doesn't look like the type of girl who'd work for a sleazy outfit like BAA. I say to her: "You look very interesting."

"You never noticed it before," she says.

"How could I? All the time I'm working for BAA I've got a grouch. Skip-tracing is a tough business."

"I'm figuring on quitting myself," Betty says. "One of your chumps came into the office last week. He was a big fellow, but he bawled like a baby. You were going to garnishee his wages unless he paid ten dollars a month on a cheap piano he bought for his daughter who wanted to be a musician, but changed her mind and eloped."

"Nix," I say. "Let me forget skip-tracing for one night."

"All right. Where we going?"

"A little place I discovered," I tell her. "You've never seen one like it."

I flag a taxi. Betty looks at me suspiciously when I give the driver the address, but doesn't make any comment until we climb out on Halsted Street, down near North Avenue.

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She looks around while I pay the driver. "What is this, one of your jokes?"

We're in front of a dump that has a sign on the window. "Plennert's Café. Lodge Hall for Rent."

"No. A fellow told me this place would be interesting."

The café is a cheap saloon. You have to go through the saloon to get into the lodge hall, in the rear.

Betty's game, I've got to say that for her. We go through the saloon into the lodge hall. There are rows of folding chairs set up in the hall and most of them are filled with men, women, and kids. You can cut the smoke.

Almost all the men in the place are dark complexioned. Some of them have to shave twice a day. The women are swarthy, too, although here and there you can see a blonde, just by way of contrast.

Betty comes in for a lot of gawking. She's glad when I pull her down in a seat near the rear.

"What is this?" she whispers to me. Her face is red and I know she doesn't like it any too well.

I say, "This is a patriotic meeting of the Sons and Daughters of Serbia. Look, up there on the platform, there's something you'll never see again — a Serbian prince."

Yeah, Prince Peter. He's pouring out a glass of water on a speaker's stand and the way some of the Serbs on the platform stand around, you can tell that they think a lot of Prince Pete.

There are about eight men on the platform and one woman. The woman is as big as three of the men. Yeah, she's the amazon who keeps the confectionery store on Sedgwick Street. She's sitting on a stout wooden bench near the side of the stage, where she can watch Prince Pete. She's pretty interested in him.

The prince drinks his water and holds up his hands. The room becomes as still as a cemetery at midnight.

"My countrypeople," the prince says in English. And then he starts jabbering in his own language. He sounds off for ten minutes and I don't understand a word of it — until everyone in the place begins clapping hands and cheering.

"Fun, isn't it?" I say to Betty, next to me.

"Is it? I suppose this is your idea of a joke."

"Not at all. You see in this room about two hundred of the choicest suckers in the city of Chicago. And do they like it? Listen to them."

About twenty or thirty of the Serbians climb up onto the platform. Prince Pete gives them some aristocratic condescension and they love it. Every one of them.

"You want to see the prince's monocle?" I ask Betty. "Wait here a minute."

I push through the crowd and climb up on the platform.

"Hello, Prince," I say to his royal highness.

Sure enough, the monocle comes out. He gets it out of his fancy vest

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and sticks it into his eye. Then he says: "Ah, Mister Cragg! How *do* you do?"

"Fine. And you — you're doing all right yourself, I see."

He drops his voice. "You have information for me, yes?"

"I have information, no. But I've got a clue. Another day or two —"

"Good! You let me know quick, yes? This," he shrugs deprecatingly, "it is part of the game. You understand?"

"Yeah, sure, I understand."

I go back to Betty. "Well, you got enough?"

"Oh, no," she replies sweetly. "I'd like to attend another patriotic meeting. How about the Bulgarians, haven't they got one tonight?"

"No, theirs is Thursday. But there's a beer stube over on North Avenue—"

She gets up quick.

In the saloon the amazon gets up from a chair and grabs my arm. "You're the man who was in my store this afternoon," she says.

I try to take my arm out of her grip and can't. "That's right, I wanted to buy a detective magazine. Uh, you got it for me?"

"Don't try to kid me, young man," she snaps at me. "I'm not as dumb as I look. I saw you talking to the prince. What's he up to?"

I take hold of her wrist and this time she lets me take it off my arm. "Sorry, madam," I tell her. "The affair between the prince and myself is confidential."

Her eyes leave me for a second and she sizes up Betty. "This your girl?"

"Uh-huh. Why?"

"You're a cop," she says. "I can always smell one. You're a private dick. And you're working for the prince. Well, I want you to do a little job for me. And I'll pay you twice what he paid you."

"He's paying me a grand."

"That's a lie! Pete hasn't got that kind of money. I'll give you six hundred." She's wearing a tweed suit that would have made a fine tent for Mr. Ringling's biggest elephant. She digs a fist into a pocket and brings out a roll of bills. She counts out six hundred dollars, in fifties.

"Here, now tell me what the prince hired you for?"

I struck the word ethics out of my dictionary when I became a skip-tracer. But Betty is breathing down my neck. I say to the fat woman, "That's against the rules. A dick never betrays a confidence."

Her piggish eyes glint like they had that afternoon when she'd got sore at me. She says, "All right, you don't have to tell me that. I think I can guess. But I want you to work for me just the same. I think Pete's two-timing me."

"Two-timing *you?*"

She shows her teeth. They are as big as a horse's. "He's got a woman somewhere. I want you to shadow him."

"And then? After I see him with the dame?"

"You give me her name and address, that's all. I'll do the rest."

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She would, too. She'd probably snatch the woman bald-headed. But that isn't my worry. Not yet. I say to the amazon: "Oke, I'll work for you."

"Start tonight. Shadow the prince. I — I can't do it myself." She scowls. "I'm too conspicuous . . . my size."

Betty pokes me in the back with her fist, but I pretend not to notice. "All right, Miss —"

"Kelly, Mamie Kelly. You know my address. When you get results, give me a buzz on the phone."

She waddles out of the saloon and about two seconds later the prince comes in. He catches up with Betty and me at the door, says, "Ah, Mr. Cragg!" and looks at Betty like she was modeling lingerie. But he doesn't stop.

When we get outside, he's waving his yellow cane at a taxicab. By luck there's another parked across the street. Even though it is facing the wrong way, I want it and want it bad.

I grab hold of Betty's wrist. "Come on!"

She jerks away. "What're you going to do? You can't doublecross your — your client, like that."

"Doublecross hell!" I snort. "That's the only game the prince understands. We're following him!"

I drag her across the street and heave her into the cab. "Follow that yellow taxi!" I tell the driver. "Five bucks if you keep on his tail."

"For ten bucks, I'll run him down!" says the cabby.

He makes a beautiful U turn, just missing a street car. Then we are off.

"Some fun," Betty says to me. But she doesn't mean it.

I grin at her. "Now, kid, you got to take the good with the bad. I work like a dog all week for Oscar Berger. I do things that make me ashamed to look in a mirror, and what do I get? Twenty, maybe thirty measly bucks a week. And now comes a chance to make some real dough — and you squawk!"

"It's dirty money," she says.

I reach into my pocket and pull out Tony Druhar's five-thousand-dollar promissory note. "Look, Betty, I almost got thrown in the can this morning, because a guy was killed. I found this on his body."

She looks at the piece of paper. "Why, it's an I.O.U. for five thousand dollars!"

"Uh-huh, and every one of these Serbians tonight has at least one chunk of paper like this. Prince Pete's one of the higher-ups in as rotten a racket I ever heard of. That's why I'm working on all these angles. I'd do it even if I wasn't getting a cent."

Well, maybe I would at that. But I know it is a lot more fun doing with a flock of fifties in my pocket, and the promise of some more.

It goes over. Betty hands the note back to me and her eyes are shining. "I didn't understand, Sam. I think — I think you're swell!"

"So're you, kid!" I say. I throw my arm about her. And then the cab stops all of a sudden and the driver yells, "Here, buddy!"

"What? Where is he?"

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"He just went into The Red Mill."

I look around and see that we are on Lawrence near Broadway. I climb out of the cab and help Betty, then hand the cabby a five-dollar bill.

I say to Betty, "Maybe, we'll get a chance to do some of that dancing you wanted."

We go inside and the headwaiter looks at Betty's silver evening dress and gives me a big smile. "Good evening, sir. A table near the front?"

"Umm," I say, looking around as if night clubs were regular stuff with me. "Something not too public, if you know what I mean?"

"Yes, sir!"

He starts off down the side along the booths. At the fourth booth I stop. "Well, well, Prince!"

He's in the booth with as dizzy a blonde as I ever saw. He looks up at me and the monocle almost falls from his eye. "You!" he says.

"Yeah, me. Ain't it a coincidence?"

Then he sees Betty and catches hold of himself. He comes to his feet and bows. I say: "Betty, allow me to introduce his royal highness, Prince Peter Strogovich . . . or something."

So help me, he takes her hand and kisses it. Then he says, "But won't you join us? Ah, Mitzi, this is my old friend, Mr. Cragg. And Miss —"

"Betty Marshall."

The headwaiter is disappointed. He's losing a tip. I wave him away.

Mitzi is giving Betty the once-over. She says, bluntly: "I saw him first."

"My eyes aren't very good," Betty gives her back.

It's over the prince's head. He gives Betty an eye-massage, his face still sad. "That is a beautiful dress you are wearing, Miss Marshall."

I say, "Ain't it? Look, Betty, your nose is shiny. Why don't you and Mitzi go spruce up?"

"I was just going to do that," Betty says. "Coming along, Mitzi?"

Mitzi gives me a dirty look, but she gets up. When the girls are gone, the prince says to me, "She is charming, no?"

"She's only my secretary. Her steady is a prizefighter who's very jealous. And now that we've got that cleared away, let's talk business. You've been holding out on me, Prince. You want me to find W. C. Roberts and all the time you're working for him."

"Of course I am working for him. But I do not know Mr. Roberts. I have never seen him. Always, he sends me just letters."

"What about the dough you collect from these Serbians, these countrymen of yours?"

"I send it to him, all! Then he mail me the commission, ten per cent."

"A very likely story. You collect from these people and mail it to Roberts. He trusts you?"

The prince scowls sadly. "That is the trouble. He does not trust me. One time, just for a joke, you know, I send him not as much money as I collect. Next week I get the letter from him. He know how much I have hold out."

"Ah, he's got a spotter. Someone

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who goes to the meetings and checks up on you. Right?"

The prince shrugs wearily. "That is what I think. But I do not know who it is."

I make a guess. "Maybe the spotter's name was Tony Druhar!"

The prince gets sore about that. "What you mean by that, Mr. Cragg?"

"Nothing. I was just joking."

"It is not a good joke. I go to see Mr. Druhar yesterday because he wants sell me note for ten dollars."

"You said you were seeing him because he'd applied to you for a job of some kind."

"When I say that I do not know you. It was because of note. I buy note sometimes at bargain."

He's lying. Maybe a Serbian's note is a bargain at five dollars, but it isn't to an Irishman.

I say, "You send this money to Mr. Roberts. To what address?"

"I send the letter to General Delivery. In two-three days I get back letter, with my commission."

"Where's the letter mailed, Chicago?"

"Yes, that is why I know Mr. Roberts still live here."

"Well, it's a nice racket for you, Prince. As long as you get your dough, what're you kicking about? Why do you want to see Roberts?"

He doesn't like that. He gives me a once-over through his monocle. "Mr. Cragg, I pay you five hundred dollars to find Mr. Roberts. You wish to continue working for me?"

"Why, certainly, Prince!" I tell him. "I was just trying to get a line on Mr. Roberts. . . . Ah, here're the girls."

They look like they'd chewed up the olive branch in the ladies' room. I get up and say to Betty: "Gosh, I just remembered we're supposed to be at Bill's party."

"I was about to remind you," Betty says smartly.

I say, "So long, Prince. Be seeing you in a day or two."

He grabs hold of Betty's hand and tries to kiss it. She jerks it away.

"But your telephone number? And your address? I like to send you the flowers."

"I've got hay fever," Betty says. "I can't stand flowers. And I haven't got a telephone. I never learned how to work one. So long, Prince."

"Goodbye!" snaps Mitzi. "It was nice meeting you."

Outside, Betty says, "Nice boy, that prince. Some woman's husband is going to shoot him one of these days."

"You forget Mamie Kelly. She's got something on him."

"You going to snitch on him?"

"Not yet. Still a few things to settle with him."

"You get anything out of him?"

"Uh-huh, the reason he wants me to find this Roberts. He tried holding out one week and discovered Roberts has a checker on him. My hunch is the prince prefers a hundred per cent to ten."

The Red Mill is only a couple of

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blocks from Betty's apartment hotel. I walk east on Lawrence Avenue with her. I turn her into Winthrop and we are almost to Ainslee before she's aware of it. Then she says, "You're taking me home? What a large evening!"

"Be a large one next time. Maybe tomorrow?"

"You'll probably take me to the Bulgarian or Siberian meeting."

I leave her outside her apartment hotel. She's sore when she goes inside. I can't help it. I'll see her in the morning. There's a couple of little things I still have to do.

I go to a stationery store on Broadway that is still open and buy a large children's book, one with stiff covers. I have the clerk wrap it in the reddest paper he has in the store, some glossy Christmas wrapping paper.

Then I get an address label from him and a bunch of postage stamps.

It's a long ride downtown, so I take the elevated. I get off at Quincy and walk over to the post office and mail the red package at the mailing window. Then I go to my cheap hotel on Jackson Street and go to bed.

Seven-thirty I get up and have breakfast at Thompson's — without the Death Notices, this time. After which I hoof over to the post office to see if my little trick works.

There are a couple of thousand lock boxes in the General Delivery room at the main Chicago post office. To watch them all, during the rush hours, would take eighteen pairs of eyes. That's why I mailed the book to Mr. Roberts. The postal clerk would put a card in his box, saying there was a package for him. He'd have to call at one of the windows for it.

So I fool around at a writing stand near the windows. I fill out eighteen or twenty post-office money orders for fancy amounts and tear them up or stick them in my pocket. I make one out every time someone comes from a box and goes to one of the windows to get a package.

It's nine forty-five when the red package is handed out. I'm almost caught sleeping, because I'd been expecting a man, and this is a girl, a young girl.

I'm right behind her when she goes out of the post office. She doesn't even suspect she's followed. She walks north up Clark Street to Monroe, then turns east and goes into a building. I ride up in the same elevator with her to the tenth floor.

When she goes in a door I walk over and look at the inscription on it. It reads: *Harker Service Company.*

I wait about five minutes, then go inside. The girl I'd followed from the post office is at a typewriter, but another, a big horsy-faced dame is behind a desk just inside the door. Beside her, against the wall, is a big cabinet with narrow pigeon-holes. There are letters in most of the pigeon-holes and another stack on the desk in front of the girl. The red package is there, too.

I say, "I understand you run a business mail service here."

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"That's right," the girl replies. "We also take telephone calls, forward mail, and provide you with a business address. No room number is necessary. The charge is only $2.00 per month."

"That's fine," I say. "Now, tell me, does a man named Brown get his mail here?"

She freezes up, right away. "Our service is absolutely confidential!"

"But I got a letter from Brown — he gave this address. I want to see him."

"In that case, you'd have to leave a message for him. Although," her face twists, "there's no Mr. Brown in our service."

"I must have got the address wrong then," I say.

I go out. There's a cigar stand in the lobby on the first floor, with a marble game next to it. I buy a package of cigarettes and shove a nickel in the slot of the marble game. There was a sticker on the glass: *For Amusement Only. No Prizes or Awards.*

It's a bumper game; the steel marbles make electric contact with springs and light up lights and register a score. I waste three nickels, then get some change from the cigar stand. "You're playing that just for fun, you know," the cigar stand man warns me.

"Sure, I'm killing time, that's all."

I spend a dollar on the game, then loaf around for a half-hour and spend another dollar. It's about eleven thirty by then and the man at the cigar stand's getting nervous about me.

I buy a candy bar and get the change in nickels and shove them into the marble game. "That's costing you money," the fellow at the stand says.

"So's the dame I'm s'posed to meet here!" I snap at him.

He chuckles. "Boy, how you can take it. Two hours!"

I pump two of the steel marbles into the slot and slam them both out with the plunger. Lights go up, a bell rings.

"Jackpot!" the cigar stand man yelps.

"No prizes, huh?" I glare at him. There's a little knob in the front of the machine. I pushed it and a small door pops open exposing a box almost filled with nickels. There are about five pounds of nickels. I stow them in my coat pockets while the cigar stand chap looks on, sick. He's still afraid that I'm a cop.

I quit then. It's just twelve when I go into the Gregorian Towers on North Michigan and ride up to Prince Peter's apartment.

He's just having his breakfast. He's wearing a purple dressing gown on which is embroidered a monogram.

"You have found him, Mr. Cragg?" he asks eagerly.

"Practically," I say. "But the expenses on this job are very heavy. If you could let me have another hundred. . . ."

He doesn't like that. "What do you mean, you have found him — practically?"

"Well, I got past the post office, anyway. A girl gets his mail at General Delivery and takes it to an address on Monroe Street."

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"To what number on Monroe Street?"

"The Davis Building. Room 1023. It's a mail-address outfit."

"Mail address? What is that?"

There was a loud knock on the prince's door. He says: "The waiter for these dishes. . . . Come in!"

The door opens and Mamie Kelly, all three hundred pounds of her, comes in. The prince jumps to his feet and turns about four shades whiter.

"Madame!" he exclaims.

She comes all the way into the room. She has something under her arm — a flat red package. The string's broken on the package and the paper disarranged. I can see the cover of a children's book.

I say: "Well, Prince, I must be going."

Mamie Kelly blocks the way to the door. She says, "Stick around, young fellow. Something I want to ask you."

"Yeah, sure," I say. "I'll run over to your store after a while. I've got to report at my office."

She shakes her big head. "No." She takes the book from under her arm and says, "Look, Pete!" and slams it over the prince's head. He goes down to the floor and stays there.

"Get up, you dirty rat!" Mamie Kelly yells.

The prince begins to whine. He sounds like a dog that has been whipped. Big Mamie reaches down and twists one of her meat hooks in the back of his purple dressing gown. She picks him up and tosses him into an easy chair.

All of a sudden I think of something. Tony Druhar, the Serbian I'd found dead — with his face turned around to his spine. . . .

Maybe you think I don't feel funny. A three-hundred-pound woman, all muscle and bone. My skin gets hot and cold and begins to crawl. What the hell, a man — you could belt him in the jaw, butt him in the stomach, or kick him where it'll do the most good. But a woman — can you do those things to a woman?

The prince is as big as me, if not bigger. Yet Mamie Kelly handles him as if he was a baby. She turns to me and says, "So you think you're smart, sending me this book?"

"Me?" I say.

"None of that, now! Della Harker's a cousin of mine. I never got a package before. When you came in there, with your phoney stuff, she got me on the telephone. I saw you from across the street, fooling around with that pin game."

"Mamie!" yelps the prince, suddenly. "*You* — you are W. C. Roberts?"

"Of course I am. How the hell you suppose I got all the money to set you up in this swell hotel? You think I made it in that crummy store I run on Sedgwick for a blind?"

The prince is about ready to faint. I'm not so far from it, myself. I'm concentrating on the door, wondering if I can get to it and out, before she can head me off.

Mamie Kelly says, "I give you all that dough, buy you the fancy clothes,

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and what do you do in return? You spend the money on blonde floozies, and try to muscle in on my racket. You think I don't know about Druhar?"

"Druhar?" the prince gasps.

"Yes, Druhar, the punk. He was starving, and I gave him a job at the store. He had to nose around, and then try to sell me out to you. Well, he got what he deserved."

"*You* killed him?"

"Like that!" she makes a motion with her two hands like wringing out a wet dishrag.

I take a deep breath and make a dash for the door.

I don't get to it. Mamie takes a quick step to one side and falls against me. She knocks me spinning and before I can get up, she swoops down on me and grabs my left arm. She twists it behind my back in a hammerlock.

I yell and heave up, trying to turn a forward somersault. A bunch of nickels fall on the floor. And then —

I yelled to high heaven. She breaks my arm. The big, fat murderess! The bones grate in my elbow and I yell bloody murder.

I guess that saves my life. After all, it's a hotel and she doesn't want a flock of cops busting in. She lets go my arm to grab my neck. I have just enough strength left to roll away.

She comes after me again, her big face twisted in a snarl. I can't see her eyes at all, they're buried in the fat of her cheeks. I'm so scared of her that I go a little crazy. I kick a chair in her way and she knocks it aside.

I try for the door again. She heads me off. I back away and step on some of the nickels that've spilled from my pocket.

And then I know what to do. It's my only chance. Two minutes more in this room with the amazon — and I'd wind up like Tony Druhar. Only more broken bones.

My left arm is hanging limp at my side and I'm dizzy with the pain of it. But there's nothing wrong with my right arm. I rip open my coat with my right hand, shrug out of the right side of it, and reach over to slide it down my left shoulder.

Mamie makes a noise like a female gorilla and starts for me. I jump back and find myself against the wall. But I've got the coat in my hand now, the coat with about five pounds of nickels in the pockets.

She comes at me and I swing the coat with all that's left in me. The noise she makes when she hits the floor reminds me of the time I got drunk at a dance and fell into the bass drum.

Prince Pete thinks this is a good time to make his getaway, but I beat him to the door and swing the weighted coat in his face.

"Wait a minute, pal," I say to him. "You made a bargain with me — four hundred bucks more if I found W. C. Roberts for you. There's Roberts. Now kick in. I need the dough, on account of I figure on quitting my skip-tracing job and maybe getting married!"

He pays. Then I pick up the telephone and call police headquarters.

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THE BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

SINCE this is being written back in the holiday doldrums of publishing, there are fewer major murders to present to you than will usually be the case in this new monthly column. Your attention as a criminous connoisseur is, however, directed to:

THE SCREAMING MIMI, by Fredric Brown (Dutton)

One of last year's *EQMM* prize winners manages the extraordinary feat of combining a lively humor with a terrifying narrative of the exploits of a Ripper. You may not quite be able to swallow the psychopathic case-history presented in the solution; but up till then you'll be riveted to your chair by one of the most imaginatively conceived, adroitly written, and thrillingly plotted of recent murder novels.

THE TENTACLES, by Dana Lyon (Harper)

There's no telling where to draw the line between mystery-suspense and the straight novel. Rightly billed as Mrs. Lyons's first "straight," this should win a large new public to her subtly forceful studies in character; but the fans of her earlier days will be nowise let down by this background-to-murder essay in domestic relations, at once believably ordinary and powerfully menacing, with one of the most convincingly evil villains to appear in many years.

ONE OF THOSE THINGS, by Peter Cheyney (Dodd, Mead)

Hitherto there have been two types of Cheyney novels: strong, hardbitten studies in English espionage, and trashily sensational imitations (almost parodies) of the American hardboiled school. Here is something new: a neat blend of the complex maneuverings of Terence O'Day, Cheyney's first credible private operative, and the straightforward routine of Chief-Detective-Inspector John Henry Dougal, a Scotland Yarder in the great tradition. A well-constructed and puzzling plot of blackmail and murder-framing, told in solid straightforward prose, makes this one of Cheyney's best and freshest books.

DEATH OF A WHITE WITCH, by Inez Oellrichs (Crime Club)

The essential ingredients in this murder of a matriarch are exceedingly familiar; and Matt Winters, Miss Oellrichs's homey and likable sleuth, has

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very little detecting to do. But able unpretentious writing and a certain simple charm give the book high readability.

With 1950 murder so far in scant supply, you're strongly urged to fill in by going back a century. Last year three reprints appeared which demand being added to your library:

MURDER BY GASLIGHT, edited by Edward Wagenknecht (Prentice-Hall)

An uneven anthology of Victorian murder, weak in its group of short stories, but containing the full text of M. E. Braddon's LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET, a sumptuously plotted thriller, not merely of historical importance but exciting on its own merits as contemporary reading.

UNCLE SILAS, by J. S. Le Fanu (Chanticleer)

As Elizabeth Bowen points out in her admirable introduction, this is not the last of the Gothic novels (it appeared in 1864), but the first of the modern novels of psychological suspense — monstrously long, but subtly monstrous in its skilled projection of terror and evil.

SELECTED WRITINGS OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY (Modern Library Giant)

Excellently edited by Philip van Doren Stern, this contains the otherwise hard-to-come-by complete text of all three essays *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* (1827–1854), the still unsurpassed foundation of all modern fact-crime writing, together with much other murderous material *passim*.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Francisco A. Branco's "The Dwarfs' Club" is one of the eleven "first stories" which were awarded special prizes in EQMM's 1948 Contest. It is interesting to note that Francisco Branco is the only foreign writer to have won a special award among the 'tec tyros of that year. The story itself, like all the other "firsts," shows great promise; it is authentically Continental in flavor, and its plot conception, colorfully reminiscent of the Red-Headed League, yet individualistically original, stems from the grand tradition, invented by Poe, fostered by Doyle, and carried on now only by our contemporaries of purest integrity, of seizing the reader's interest by an irresistibly provocative situation or background.

Francisco Branco is Portuguese. His full name is Francisco Afonso da Conceicao Branco. He was less than twenty years old when he wrote and submitted "The Dwarfs' Club." In his letter to your Editors, Francisco wrote: "Let us skip my age, it's irrelevant." But we do not agree: it is enormously encouraging, and important, to weigh the quality of work being done by teen-age detective-story writers all over the world.

Unlike most authors, young or old, Francisco has few interests outside of incessant reading. He devours "everything that falls under his eye." For a time he was extraordinarily partial to detective fiction, but that enthusiasm has waned — he discovered that it was much more fun to write detective stories than to read them. His hobby is learning foreign languages. In addition to his native tongue, Francisco can read and write fluently in French, English, German, Spanish, Italian, and Latin, and not quite so accurately in Russian, Swedish, Danish, and Dutch. He is now planning to study Hindustani, Arabic, Hungarian, and Bantu.

Imagine what Francisco Branco is going to do some day with the character of a polyglot private eye? Talk about your detective double-talk!

THE DWARFS' CLUB

by FRANCISCO A. BRANCO

(translated by Anthony Boucher)

WHEN Dona Mafalda tells this story at tea parties, the ladies of her set never believe a word of it. While they listen, apparently entranced, they break in with little cries of happy enthusiasm and even interpolate such admiring comments as, "How clever you are, Dona Ma-

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falda!" or "How ever *did* you manage to solve all that!"

But as soon as Dona Mafalda leaves the room for a moment, the tone of the commentary is altered.

"How *can* she make up such stories!" one of her most fervent admirers will say, delightedly swallowing the last bite of cake and the last gulp of tea. "She's so naïve to think we'll believe such fibs. She really ought to write detective stories."

And they all agree unanimously, though admitting that at least it is a good story. Thus it has been till now, and thus it will ever be.

It was merely a draft of cold air that introduced Dona Mafalda to the case of the Dwarfs' Club. A providential draft, as she was later to admit; but at the time she saw in it only the wretched cause of the inevitable cold, which forced her to take to her bed and send for her old friend Dr. Faust.

Dr. Faust ranked among the most widely known physicians in Lisbon. This celebrity was possibly due less to his medical skill than to his ridiculously dwarfed body. He boasted a resplendent bald pate and a wrinkled face, with small, piercing black eyes and the tremendous jutting beak of a parrot. The most valuable function of this last feature, in its owner's opinion, was its power so to terrify children that they would endure a medical examination in perfect obedient quiet. Beneath the nose a great grizzled mustache wabbled when he talked and bristled ferociously during the doctor's frequent attacks of rage. He made a fantastic figure, predestined to the persecutions of small boys in the streets.

Dr. Faust was never precisely calm; but that day he seemed even more excited than usual. Distractedly he examined Dona Mafalda, listened to her chest, and reassured her that she had only a trifling cold. So distraught were his movements that his stethoscope got away from him as he was putting it back in its case, and he recaptured it only after a complex series of nervous maneuvers. He had decided on an injection; and while the syringe and needles were boiling in the kitchen, the old lady ventured to ask him pointblank, "Has something happened to you, doctor?"

"Has something happened to me?" the dwarf roared, spreading his arms in a sarcastic gesture. "Something's happened that never happened before in all my life. I suddenly find myself involved in a murder!"

"A murder?" Dona Mafalda's eyes glittered with interest. "But why should you be so worried? The doctor is never the murderer."

"Of course I'm not. I've nothing to be afraid of there. But think of wasting hours upon hours answering the idiotic questions of an inspector who doesn't believe a word I say!"

"That must be a bore," Dona Mafalda sympathized. "But then if you're a suspect . . ."

"But I'm not!" Dr. Faust bellowed, his mustache trembling frenziedly. "These are the facts: *I* . . . am *not* . . . a suspect. I have a perfect alibi!"

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"I understand," the old lady said soothingly. "All policemen are stupid — even my dear godson Rogério. But where did this happen? I haven't seen anything in the papers."

Dr. Faust sank into an armchair and breathed deeply to restore his calm. "It will be in the evening papers. It's a story that will seem fantastic to you . . . incredible. It happened in the Dwarfs' Club." He saw Dona Mafalda's smile, and his voice took on a menacing tone. "Is there anything peculiar about that?"

"Oh, nothing," Dona Mafalda hastened to say. She knew how sensitive the doctor was concerning the question of his height. "But I'd never heard of such a club and the name is rather amusing. Where is it?"

The doctor regarded Dona Mafalda suspiciously as he replied, "It is a legally established club with membership limited to men whose height does not exceed forty inches — a club to which I have the *honor* to belong. It was not well known, but this wretched case will bring it more than enough publicity. In that club today a man was murdered under most mysterious circumstances — a Spanish dwarf named Miguel Hernández, who entered the club only two days ago. There was a great argument among the members as to the legality of admitting foreigners into the club; but since we were in great need of an accountant, and that was his profession, Dr. Sebastião Lima — our president and his sponsor — persuaded us to accept him. Little did we know that in so short a time the Spaniard would cause us such terrible difficulties! To go and get himself murdered like this!" Dr. Faust shook his head, indignant at Hernández' lack of foresight. "Morais said then, 'This man will bring disgrace on the Club! We don't want foreigners!' And how right he was. Now Hernández is murdered and all the members of the Club are suspects. . . . May I smoke, Dona Mafalda?"

Dona Mafalda gave her permission, her interest in the story conquering her horrified memory of the poisonous qualities of Dr. Faust's cigars. "All the members? This must be a difficult case for the police," she murmured, stoically watching the dwarf light a cigar.

"But 'all the members' does not mean many suspects. Since Hernández died, the Club consists of only five members. And the case is not a markedly difficult one. If Inspector Favelas had paid any attention to me, he could have the murderer behind bars by now." Dr. Faust sucked furiously at his cheroot and the overpowering smoke all but asphyxiated Dona Mafalda. "But the man's an absolute fool!"

"And why did the Club need an accountant?" Dona Mafalda asked.

"Ah, it's a long time since a cigar's tasted so good to me," Dr. Faust observed, jovially scattering the ash on the carpet. "Can you believe it? Some of my patients won't let me smoke. Say it bothers them." He smiled affectionately at Dona Mafalda. "You

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ask why we needed an accountant. I see you're interested in the case. It'll be best if I tell you the whole story while we're waiting for the syringe. I'll wager that when I'm through you'll agree with me that the Inspector is an imbecile and that only a blind man could fail to spot the murderer."

The Dwarfs' Club [Dr. Faust began] was founded some years ago with the purpose of proving to the so-called normal men that we dwarfs are as intelligent as they, if not more so. I was a founding member. There were twelve of us at first; but some died, no new candidates appeared, and we were finally reduced to five.

From the beginning we have suffered serious financial difficulties, and only today can we say that we have enough money to carry out our program. This we owe to one of our original members, the banker Samuel Corvo, who left us his fortune. I may add that at the same time he left us his secretary, the only man of "normal" stature whom we allow in the club, an individual with an extraordinary aptitude for business affairs. Thanks to this Eurico Fontes, we have managed to increase our capital through loans, investments, and that sort of thing. It was a stroke of luck, since none of us understands a blessed thing about business; and the only flaw in the situation lay in his not being a dwarf. But dwarfs are scarce, and it was hard to find one to take his place.

Now two weeks ago this secretary announced that he had found a more attractive position and intended to leave us. We tried to dissuade him, but failed.

And here, you might say, is where the case proper begins.

As I said, the Club consisted (and consists) of five members: myself; the president, a lawyer named Sebastião Lima; António Morais, curator of a museum here in the city; an agronomist named Montalvo; and a . . . a character who goes under the name of José Barroso and seems to have no fixed profession. He says he was a juggler in a circus, but I've heard that he spent much of his life in jail. He says that that's slander; and certainly we pay no heed to it — within the Club we are all equals.

To fill Fontes' place, Dr. Lima found this Spanish dwarf who claimed to be an accountant. This would indeed have been a find, if only he had not been a foreigner; and this was not only my own opinion, but also that of Morais. To discuss the case we called a general assembly, which turned into a somewhat tempestuous session. Morais and I opposed the admission of the Spaniard; Montalvo and Dr. Lima, who had nominated him, argued in his favor. The president felt that the chance to obtain a member to look after the business affairs of the Club was an opportunity we should not let escape us, since we should no longer be obliged to admit among us a man of abnormal stature, as the president always refers to

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those who are not dwarfs like us.

"As for me," I roared, "all I say is: I don't want foreigners in the Club!"

José Barroso had not entered the discussion. He seemed completely uninterested. Nevertheless, he voted in favor of admitting Hernández; and thus the matter was settled.

Now we begin the series of events which were from the first a signal of ill omen and which, to my mind, unmistakably indicate the murderer. Barroso had come late and had not heard the name of the dwarf proposed for membership; and throughout the debate Dr. Lima had referred to him only as "this fine accountant" while I had used less flattering but equally unspecific terms. When the vote was counted, Dr. Lima proclaimed triumphantly, "From this moment on the Dwarfs' Club has one more member: Miguel Hernández."

Barroso's eyes opened wide. "Huh? Miguel Hernández?"

"You know him?" the president asked curiously.

The juggler made no answer, but looked thoughtful. Then, to our astonishment, he coughed and queried, "Can I change my vote?"

Of course Dr. Lima, seeing so hard-fought a victory on the verge of collapse, all but succumbed to apoplexy. Furiously he denied Barroso the right to change.

Quietly Barroso stated that it was all right, he wouldn't insist. And thus the general assembly closed in an atmosphere something short of amicable.

The next day — that is, day before yesterday — all the members went in the morning to visit the museum where Morais is curator. He had recently acquired an extremely interesting collection of ancient weapons, and he wanted us perforce to admire them. This was the first occasion upon which Hernández appeared in the role of member. From the first I felt an extraordinary antipathy toward him. He had a long-pointed black mustache and highly disagreeable black eyes. We were introduced to him one by one by Dr. Lima. When he reached Barroso, the two stared at each other fixedly for several seconds before speaking. Though they gave no outward signs of recognition, I am positive that they recognized each other — and not with pleasant memories.

Please note that this visit to the museum is of the greatest importance, since it was there that the murderer stole his weapon.

[Dr. Faust stopped speaking as a maid entered the room and set down beside him a steaming aluminum vessel. The dwarf waited until she had left before continuing.]

From the beginning I was positive that the Spaniard was a disruptive element. That first afternoon he was drinking heavily, and a certain incident took place in the bar — an incident trifling enough at the time, but by now deeply significant. I happened to be chatting there with Dr. Lima, while the Spaniard was getting drunk.

I was telling the president some

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escapades of my childhood on my father's estate, when Dr. Lima chanced to remark, "I say, Dr. Faust, is your father still living?"

Before I could reply, the Spaniard leaned over to us and gurgled, "Hell, no. Goethe's been dead for years."

It was a stupid drunken utterance, devoid alike of humor and importance. Nevertheless I was enraged. We argued, we exchanged insults, we all but came to blows. I shouted at him that he was a drunkard, that I'd opposed his admission to the Club simply because he was a stranger but that if I'd known him personally, I'd have resigned from the Club rather than consent to his membership. I believe that I even said something about killing him. You know, Dona Mafalda, how easily I lose my temper — and my head along with it. Dr. Lima calmed us down, the Spaniard staggered off, and the incident ended.

Now we come to the murder.

This morning we all met in the Club. The secretary Fontes was there also, to turn over the books and papers to the Spaniard and to give him what explanations might be necessary. Dr. Lima had had an office set up for Hernández, a small room with a window opening on the garden in back and one door leading to the hall. There is another door opening into the Club archives, a room full of steel filing cases, with a window six feet from the ground of the courtyard inside the building.

The Spaniard said brusquely that he wanted to be alone so that he could concentrate on getting his work started, so Dr. Lima and Fontes and I withdrew. Hernández saw us to the door, saying he would call for Fontes if he encountered any difficulties; and we heard the key turn in the lock as we left.

Hernández' rudeness had infuriated me, and in the hall I turned to Dr. Lima and snorted, "We've got a fine business manager now! He's not locking himself up to work better — just to get drunk in peace!"

Dr. Lima, of course, was protesting when Barroso, who had overheard us, interrupted with a smile, "Dr. Faust's right. Hernández can sop it up better than a sponge. As for his talents as an accountant or a business manager . . . well, I have my doubts."

The president was so irritated by Barroso's remark that he at once stormed out of the Club.

Barroso and I went into the library. I like to read the morning papers there, and sometimes to settle down in one of the armchairs with a book and a glass of something. We found Morais there looking for a magazine, and as we came in he asked the time. I looked at my watch and saw that it was exactly ten. Barroso confirmed this, and Morais thanked us as he set his watch.

Thanks to this incident, we can establish that Hernández locked himself in his office three or four minutes before ten o'clock. This is important, since from this point on only his murderer was to see him alive.

At 11:20 Montalvo and Morais

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found the Spaniard dead in his office. They were walking along the hall when the agronomist glanced out into the inner courtyard, which I recently mentioned, and stopped abruptly.

"Look, Morais," he said, "what's that chair doing out there?" And he pointed to one of those canvas folding-chairs set up against the wall directly under the window of the archives room. The two went out into the courtyard and curiously contemplated the chair and the open window.

Now in the courtyard there is a small shed where we keep the furniture we aren't using. Our own furniture is smaller in scale than the usual; and we keep in there a few pieces of "normal" size. Morais and Montalvo knew that the chair belonged in there. Seeing the door of the shed open, they began to suspect that something out of the ordinary was going on.

With the help of the chair they clambered into the archives room and were confronted with the following scene: The door to Hernández' office was wide open, affording a full view of the other room. Hernández was sprawled out over his desk. Even from the next room they were sure that he was dead. The wrought-iron hilt of a dagger protruded from his back and blood covered the papers and the account-books.

Morais paled at sight of the dagger and seized Montalvo by the arm. "The — the — dagger!" he stammered. "The dagger they stole from the museum!"

Montalvo, puzzled, asked him what he was talking about.

"Yesterday morning I missed that dagger," Morais explained. "I thought nothing of it, it's of no particular value. But now things are different — the whole Club visited the museum day before yesterday . . ." And Morais lapsed into a significant silence.

They decided to summon me to verify the fact of death and to call the police. Morais, pale and trembling, found me with Barroso and Fontes, in the latter's office.

I made a brief examination of the body, disturbing it as little as possible. Montalvo explained to me how the murderer had got in. He drew me to the window of the archives room and pointed out the chair. "There's no doubt he got in through here," he observed. "The garden window of Hernández' room is latched on the inside and the door to the hall was locked. We had to unlock it so Morais could fetch you, Dr. Faust."

I agreed, and added that this all fitted in with the position of the body. "I remember that the door to the archives was closed when we were here at ten," I said. "Either the murderer knew that the archives window was open, or he opened it himself. He found the chair in the courtyard shed so that he could reach the window and climb into the room. Since the communicating door was closed, Hernández could not see him. Then the murderer opened the door and came in here into the office.

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What follows is more distasteful to visualize. The Spaniard heard him come in, rose from his chair, and probably asked him what he wanted. The murderer came up to the desk, said something to distract Hernández, and plunged the dagger into him twice. The second blow perforated the heart, and Hernández died immediately. Then the murderer left in the same manner that he had entered. He had no time to put the chair away because people were constantly passing along the hall and he wished to take the fewest risks possible."

All of them listened to me attentively, except Barroso, who seemed hypnotized by the body. "What's that?" he suddenly demanded, pointing at the surface of the desk.

"That" was a sheet of white paper, somewhat wrinkled, lying between two books and half-hidden by the dead man's hand. On the paper, written in large letters of blood, stood G O E T H . . . followed by a meaningless scrawl.

Dona Mafalda, you can imagine that I turned pale indeed. I have already told you of the scene in the bar, and you can readily see that the murderer intended to incriminate me. As all eyes settled accusingly on me, I could guess the consensus: "Hernández wanted to leave a clue pointing at the murderer. And it seems clear enough!" It was a fiendish idea to blame me for the crime, taking advantage of the fact that I am named Faust, and at the same time a childish one, as I proceeded to demonstrate.

I raised the corpse's hand and carefully studied the bloodstained fingers.

"The criminal is trying to deceive us by incriminating me," I said coldly, placing the hand back in position, while the others stared at me disconcertingly. "Hernández did not write this; from the angle of the dagger which obviously penetrated his heart, his death must have been instantaneous. Besides, why should he not have written simply *Faust*, if he wished to accuse me? It would be a far clearer clue."

The others naturally agreed, but I observed a certain distrust and even suspicion of me. Any one of them could have written the word *Goeth* . . .; they all knew the story.

I was understandably a trifle nervous, and my nervousness increased when I heard Morais' tale of the theft from the museum.

"I first noticed the theft after our visit," he said emphatically.

[Dr. Faust rose. He held a flame to his tongs, lifted the syringe out of the vessel brought by the maid, affixed a needle, broke open an ampule of colorless liquid, and began to fill the syringe.]

Montalvo conceived the idea that the motive for the crime might have been the theft of some document or such. Fontes rapidly examined the papers and books on the desk, without touching the corpse. "Nothing missing here," he announced. "It'd take a long search to tell if anything was gone from the archives."

"He wouldn't have had to kill

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Hernández," Morais protested, "if he'd wanted something from the archives. The door was closed and he couldn't be seen."

"Maybe this is what happened," Barroso suggested. "Maybe the Spaniard heard a funny noise in the archives and —"

"Impossible!" I broke in. "We wouldn't have found his body on the desk."

My natural gesture indicated the body as I spoke, and suddenly Montalvo cried, "The button!"

We stared at him in amazement — all save Morais, who quickly asked, "What about the button?"

"It's from Dr. Faust's coat-sleeve," the agronomist murmured, avoiding my eye.

I politely demanded what the devil he meant. Still looking at Morais, Montalvo explained: "When we were in the courtyard trying to get in here, I climbed up on that canvas folding-chair. It wasn't set up properly; it gave way under me and I fell flat on my face. That's how I saw the button on the ground under the window. I asked Morais if it was his and he said no. I absent-mindedly put it in my pocket, set the chair up right, and we climbed in. I never thought about the button again. Isn't that right, Morais?"

The curator nodded silently as the other produced a small brown button. Mechanically I raised my arm and let Montalvo fit it onto my sleeve, where indeed a button was missing. It was exactly like the others; there was no doubt that it belonged there.

"Good thing I fell down," the agronomist observed, cautiously tucking the button away. "Otherwise no one might have seen it and we'd have lost an important clue."

He had hardly finished when I exploded, "Important! This means that you think I'm the murderer, doesn't it? How can men be such idiots? Don't you see that the real murderer is trying to involve me again?"

"That isn't what I —" Montalvo began, but I did not allow him to go on. I lost my head and called him an ass, an imbecile, and a few slightly more emphatic terms. I finally calmed down after Fontes and Barroso had forcibly carried me from the room.

We telephoned the police and they came at once. And thus ends the first act of the tragedy, *Murder in the Dwarfs' Club*, as the papers will undoubtedly label it.

Dr. Faust smiled bitterly and paused from pure weariness. While he was talking he had filled the syringe and approached Dona Mafalda. The old lady drew back her sleeve and offered him her arm. She did this distractedly, shuddering a trifle as she envisioned the macabre and grotesque scene in the office. Four dwarfs, full of terror and suspicion, clustered around the corpse of a fifth sprawled over a miniature desk, with the hilt of an ancient dagger jutting absurdly from his back . . . As the doctor wiped her skin with alcohol, Dona Mafalda reined in her imagina-

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tion and concentrated on the problem.

"And weren't they able to establish the time of death?" she asked. "That would be valuable because of the ali — Ow!"

"Does it hurt?" Dr. Faust asked solicitously as he pushed in the plunger. "I don't know what the police autopsy will claim to reveal, but in my opinion Hernández died between 10:20 and 10:50. That may seem a wide margin, but if I were called as a witness that would be my testimony." He deftly withdrew the needle and disinfected the site of the injection.

"But you aren't in a witness-box now, doctor . . ."

The dwarf laughed, and began to put his apparatus back in his bag. "Outside of the witness-box," he stated, "just between friends, I'd personally prefer the first fifteen minutes of that indicated half-hour, which would put the Spaniard's death between 10:20 and 10:35. We can be sure that the Spaniard was alive up to 10:20, because the police learned that Montalvo and Barroso passed through the hall at that time and noticed no chair in the patio.

"Now let us consider the alibis. I was with Eurico Fontes in his office — that reminds me; we must refurnish that office since it will no longer be occupied by what our president calls an abnormal man — from 10:05, when I left Morais and Barroso in the library, until 11:25, when Morais came for me. Fontes was arranging more of his papers to turn over to Hernández, and I read several chapters of a book.

"Morais says he was in the library until he went out in the hall with Montalvo and discovered the chair. "Montalvo says he was wandering around the Club from 10 to 10:30. He visited the bar and took a few practice shots in the billiard room. He can give no times; but Barroso saw him in the billiard room around 10:15. From 10:30 on, Montalvo was in the library with Morais, reading magazines until 11:20.

"Barroso is even less specific. He was never long in any given spot in the Club save the bar, and he doesn't even know at what times he was there. His only definite time is 10:15 in the billiard room, after which he says he spent some minutes in the rear garden studying an ant hill.

"As for Dr. Lima, he is completely out of the question. At the time that Hernández was being murdered, our president was in a hospital. As I told you, he left the Club at 10, furious with Barroso and me. A short while later, while leaving a nearby bakery, he was hit by an Army truck. I myself saw the accident from the front room of the Club; but at that distance I did not recognize him — I thought it was a child. Only later did we learn the facts — when the hospital telephoned us. It was only a minor accident — a few trifling bruises and a bad scare — but a highly fortunate accident in that it completely clears him of any suspicion in the murder.

"We are positive, I may add, that

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the murderer is one of us. Both the dagger and the use of the *Goeth* clue restrict suspicion to us; and only members were in the Club that day."

"There's only one thing . . ." Dona Mafalda ventured. "You said, doctor, that the murderer was clearly indicated in your story and that only an idiot could fail to see who he must be. Well . . . I *don't* see."

"You don't?"

"No," Dona Mafalda lied innocently. She was beginning to reach a very clear picture of Hernández' murderer, but she suspected that it was not the same as Dr. Faust's.

"It's true I did forget one terribly compromising detail," Dr. Faust admitted. "But that wasn't the case when I talked to that prime donkey Inspector Favelas!" he shouted in a fresh access of rage.

"And that fact is . . . ?" Dona Mafalda hastened to appease him.

"Oh!" Dr. Faust calmed himself and felt for his cigar case. Dona Mafalda shrank back in bed, terror-struck; but he thought better of it and went on, "That fact concerns the theft of the dagger. Only we six members visited the museum. I remember perfectly where that dagger was because its hilt is wrought in an extremely bizarre design difficult to overlook. It was displayed in a glass case, along with other weapons, in one of the last rooms we visited. We all entered the room and Morais, whose true passion in life is the museum, delivered something of a dissertation on a display of Ethiopian weapons hanging on the wall. Then he went into the next room, followed by the others; but I remained behind to examine some curiously fashioned weapon — a glaive, I think they call it — near the door. As I went to follow my companions, I chanced to look back and saw Barroso. He too had lingered behind, and was leaning over the case I mentioned, seemingly fascinated by the weapons. And I clearly remember that *the dagger was still there*."

"I see," the old lady murmured thoughtfully. "In your opinion, José Barroso is the murderer."

"It's clear as daylight!" Dr. Faust began to count on his fingers. "One: Some sort of intimacy existed between him and Hernández. There's nothing to prove it, but we can take it for certain. Two, he has no satisfactory alibi. Three, he was not lacking in opportunity to steal the dagger — or to be blunt, he's the only one who could have stolen it."

The dwarf waited for some comment from Dona Mafalda. When none was forthcoming, he looked at his large gold watch and took his farewell. "Good night, Dona Mafalda. I'll be back tomorrow before eleven, and I think you'll be able to get up by then."

"Good night, Dr. Faust," murmured Dona Mafalda, distractedly watching the minuscule figure of the doctor hopping from the room.

Behind her glasses, Dona Mafalda's alert eyes scrutinized every item in the newspaper until they settled on a paragraph under the general heading,

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ACCIDENTS IN LISBON. With a little cry of delight she brought the paper almost up to her nose (it still smelled of fresh ink) and read half-aloud the nine lines of small type:

HIT BY A TRUCK

As Dr. Sebastião Lima, lawyer of this city, was leaving a bakery in the Avenida da Liberdade at 10:25 this morning, he was knocked down by an Army truck. Taken to the hospital, he was found to have suffered only slight bruises. He returned to his home after being treated.

Dona Mafalda beamed at the item. "Clear as daylight," she murmured.

"Did Hernández' ghost let you sleep, doctor?"

Dr. Faust took the stethoscope from his bag and replied, "It's true I did not have a very good night. But you understand — the excitement, all those questions . . ."

Dona Mafalda observed that her physician was in extremely good humor this morning. He listened to her chest carefully, and his movements were quiet and controlled.

"If you want to, you may get up this afternoon," he told her when he had finished his examination. "The weather's not too cold, and it won't do you any harm. Now I'll give you another shot like yesterday and we'll consider you practically cured."

The injection followed, with full ritual, and it was not until the dwarf was packing away his apparatus that Dona Mafalda asked if there was any news about the murder.

Dr. Faust nodded vigorously. "Great news!" he exclaimed with a broad smile. "Inspector Favelas turned out not to be so obtuse as he seemed; he's merely rather slow at understanding things. What I had told him gradually filtered into his mind, and this morning he picked on Barroso as a suspect. At first this gentleman protested and blustered, denying that he had killed Hernández or even known him previously. But at last he confessed."

"What?" Dona Mafalda's eyes opened wide. "He confessed to the murder?"

"Well, no. That will come later, you can be sure. He confessed that he'd known Hernández in Spain, when he was traveling with the circus. Hernández was just as much an accountant as I am the pyramid of Cheops. The rascal had undoubtedly arranged this impersonation to rob us. In Madrid, Barroso joined with him in some illegal venture; Hernández informed the authorities and ran off with the money. Barroso served several years in prison; and the memory of this free hospitality occasioned a decided warmth in his feelings for the Spaniard — so much warmth that when he found him again, he could express his tender sentiments only by plunging a knife into him."

"What does he say about that knife?"

"Of course he denies having taken

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it. He asserts that the knife was still there when he left the room. In any event, I consider the case solved. The inspector was still insistent this morning on verifying my alibi, until he wore himself out questioning Fontes. 'But look: are you certain that Dr. Faust never left the office? Absolutely certain?' This went on for two hours, the poor secretary tells me. I agree that the button near the chair and the paper on the desk make me seem terribly suspect; but they're so obviously mere attempts to incriminate me, I can't feel that that Favelas is really intelligent."

"You're right," Dona Mafalda murmured. "Not a trace of intelligence . . ." Dr. Faust eyed her, fascinated by her odd tone. "Then I can get up this afternoon, can't I, doctor?"

And that afternoon Dona Mafalda got up, and went directly to police headquarters where she had a brief conference with her godson Rogério Montana, sergeant in the Lisbon Judiciary Police. This conference ended with Montana hastily conducting the old lady to the office of Inspector Favelas.

"I have come to you," Dona Mafalda began, sitting down and timidly eyeing the inspector, "because fate chose to place in my hands the solution to the affair at the Dwarfs' Club."

"Ah, splendid!" The inspector rubbed his hands with evident satisfaction. He had flowing black hair, dark brown eyes, and a full moon of a face to which a tiny mustache with turned-up points added a note of incongruity. "You mean, madame, that you have happened on a fact unknown to the police which clearly points out the murderer of Miguel Hernández? Splendid!" he repeated. "Possibly you saw the murderer steal the dagger?"

Dona Mafalda shifted nervously in her armchair. "It isn't that," she said timidly. "It isn't that. I . . ." she hesitated, casting a terrified glance at the inspector, "I . . . deduced," she gulped hastily, "yes, deduced, that's it, who the murderer must be."

"Oh!" The inspector made no attempt to conceal his astonishment. Dona Mafalda shrank back as his eyes coldly surveyed her from head to foot.

Rogério Montana coughed and stepped forward. "If you will permit me, Inspector," he ventured, "I should tell you that this isn't the first time my godmother has solved a crime. I can assure you . . ." Montana gulped and turned red ". . . she has already helped me in several cases that otherwise would have remained unsolved."

The inspector's cold gaze scrutinized the crimson Montana for several moments and then rested on Dona Mafalda. "Get on with it, you old witch! Tell me what you've dreamed up, and then clear out — I've got work to do!" his eyes said clearly.

Dona Mafalda took a deep breath, gave a grateful glance to her godson, and spoke: "How was it possible for

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Dr. Faust to be continuously with Eurico Fontes in the secretary's office, from 10:05 to 11:25, and yet see Dr. Lima knocked down at 10:25 from the *front room* of the Club?"

The inspector sat up and opened his eyes wide. Dona Mafalda smiled. "Dr. Faust was lying. He was away from the office at least long enough for —"

She had no chance to finish. The inspector, paying no further heed to her, was already barking orders into his office telephone.

The library of the Dwarfs' Club seemed larger than it really was because of the diminutiveness of its tables and chairs. Dona Mafalda managed with some difficulty to get her knees under the Lilliputian table, looked around and let her eyes savor the delights of the fantastic scene.

The members of the Club, hastily summoned by Inspector Favelas, formed the strangest assemblage she had ever witnessed. Sitting quiet and very straight in their tiny chairs, like schoolboys before their teacher, the dwarfs suspiciously regarded the inspector, who had been unsuccessful in getting his legs under the table and was left with his knees jutting up ridiculously.

On the right of the old lady Dr. Faust chewed his mustache and let no detail of the proceedings escape him. When he saw Dona Mafalda his mouth opened wide, but he said only, "What are you doing here? Very imprudent to leave the house."

At the left of Favelas sat Dr. Lima, a white-haired homunculus with a monocle, a bandaged hand, and a few scratches on his wrinkled cheeks. The president of the Dwarfs' Club seemed uninterested in what was to develop; he sat motionless, his eyes fixed on the surface of the table.

Next to the lawyer sat the curator Morais, elbows on the table, eyes peering out from behind thick lenses. At his side was the agronomist Montalvo, a completely bald pigmy with red cheeks and glittering eyes.

On the other side of Dr. Faust was Barroso, guarded by two policemen. He was the smallest of the dwarfs and badly hunched. There were worried wrinkles in his face, and he kept furtively eying the inspector.

Eurico Fontes — tall, dark, green-eyed — sat near the juggler; and a soldierly police sergeant, whose name Dona Mafalda did not know, completed the assembly.

"We have gathered here," the inspector announced, "to unmask the murderer of Hernández. The reporters have often alluded to my taste for the theatrical. Well, they're right, as this gathering proves. A gathering of all the suspects, just like in a detective story." Favelas smiled. "Perhaps the murderer would like to confess?"

In the tense silence that followed Dona Mafalda could hear Dr. Faust's labored breathing.

"Very well," Favelas snapped. "Dr. Faust!" (Dona Mafalda felt the doctor's sudden shudder.) "How does it happen that you saw Dr.

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Lima's accident at 10:25 from the front room if, as you state, you were with Fontes in his office at that time?"

They all looked accusingly at the doctor, whose cheeks began to turn an apoplectic purple.

"Dr. Faust! Why did you kill Hernández?"

For several seconds Favelas' voice echoed in the room. Then suddenly the doctor rose, his mustache bristling. He glared at Dona Mafalda, then turned and ran for the door. One of the policemen guarding Barroso rapidly thrust a foot between the physician's legs. Dr. Faust fell with a crash. After a brief struggle the officer forced him to his feet and triumphantly dragged him forward.

Dr. Faust's mustache trembled with rage as his eyes shot daggers at Dona Mafalda. "Thanks to this . . . this . . ." he stammered, too furious to finish his sentence.

Dona Mafalda smiled at him. Then she turned to the inspector, a malicious glint in her eyes. "I think you must be mistaken, inspector. I never said that Dr. Faust was the murderer." Naïvely she opened her eyes wide — if not quite so wide as Favelas' mouth. "You didn't let me finish when I was in your office. What I was going to say was: 'Dr. Faust was lying. He was away from the office at least long enough for Eurico Fontes to commit the murder!'"

"Why do you make such an idiotic accusation, madam?" the secretary asked scornfully.

Dona Mafalda kept her eyes on him. "You can't get away, Senhor Fontes," she answered slowly. "Inadvertently you left one clue that accuses you, and you alone, of the murder of Hernández. It was you who killed him — because you are the only member of the Dwarfs' Club who is not a dwarf!

"Senhor Montalvo found Dr. Faust's button in the courtyard because, when he went to climb in the window, the canvas folding-chair collapsed under him. Why? Because 'it wasn't set up properly.' Then how did the murderer climb up on the chair, crawl through the window, commit his crime, and climb down onto the chair again — if the chair was not properly set up?" Dona Mafalda paused. Fontes avoided her gaze.

"There's only one answer: *The chair was not used.* Now we know positively that the murderer came in through that window; the door was locked and the other window bolted on the inside. Therefore he climbed in through the window *without any help.* According to their by-laws, the members of the Dwarfs' Club cannot be taller than forty inches. The window is six feet — seventy-two inches — from the ground. Only you could have entered unaided. You realized this after the crime, fetched out the chair to throw suspicion elsewhere — away from yourself — but you were in too much of a hurry to notice if you'd set it up properly."

"*Quod erat demonstrandum* . . ." the secretary murmured ironically.

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"The matter of the dagger is simple," Dona Mafalda went on. "You went to the museum after the Club's visit; Senhor Morais did not notice the theft until the next morning. What is masterful is the way you made Dr. Faust your unwitting accomplice, by planting so much evidence against him that he eagerly welcomed the alibi you gave him. The dear man is far too much of an egoist to realize that you were at the same time providing an alibi for yourself."

"My dear lady . . ." Fontes' voice was not quite so certain as before. "You've really left only one thing to explain — precisely why the devil I should murder a man I'd never seen before?"

Dona Mafalda half-closed her eyes. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to examine the Club's account books? I think the answer might be there."

She could see that she'd hit the mark. For an instant Fontes remained motionless. Then, with one unprintable syllable, he swiftly rose, seized the heavy inkwell in front of Montalvo, and hurled it violently straight at Dona Mafalda's head.

The first words of Inspector Favelas, when he visited Dona Mafalda the next day, were, "You were wonderful! I knew all the facts but I didn't see their implications. In fact, I still rather suspect that you solved the case by witchcraft."

"Nothing supernatural about it." Dona Mafalda's eyes shone with triumphant satisfaction. "All you need to solve cases like this is common sense."

"He confessed last night," said Favelas. "You were right about the accounts. He'd been living high on the Club's capital. He had everything set to go to Mexico, but before he could get his passport, Dr. Lima turned up this dwarf-accountant. He needed time to get out of the country; and Hernández' death would postpone an examination of the books."

"If he'd only known that Hernández was a fraud!" Dona Mafalda smiled. "The whole crime was unnecessary."

"He wasn't taking any chances. Intelligent man, that Fontes. Excitable, too! Such violence when he hurled that inkwell at you!"

"I haven't thanked you enough, Inspector. It took courage to step in front of me then."

"It was nothing," he protested modestly. "I was knocked out for a minute, got my uniform covered with ink and my jaw practically split; but I arrested a murderer. That's a fair exchange. But I'm still not sure," he grinned, "if I shouldn't have let it hit you. To keep me in ignorance of the murderer's identity all that time . . .!"

"If you'd shown in your office a trifle more enthusiasm for my talents as a detective . . ." The old lady smiled. "And besides, I felt Dr. Faust deserved a bad quarter of an hour. I wanted a little revenge for those cigars."

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THE HUMMING BIRD COMES HOME

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

THIS story must be told in terms of two dimensions — hearing and touch. For sight has no part in it. It is the story of "Ma" Adams and her son Ben, and how he went straight. And Ma Adams was blind. . . .

There were three of them in the front room of the big country house, one night about dusk. Ma Adams and Mary, who was her companion, and a man's voice coming in over the radio from a big city several hundred miles away.

Ma Adams sat in her rocking chair, stroking a tortoise-shell cat on her lap. You could not tell she was blind by looking at her. The pupils of her eyes were not destroyed. Only a certain fixedness about them gave her away.

In every other possible way life seemed to have done its best to atone to her for its cruelty. She did not look the fifty-six years that were her age. Her face, under its halo of silvery hair, was that of a woman of thirty. Her back was as straight as a youngster's. As long as she remained indoors, she found her way about unaided with astonishing dexterity. Pieces of furniture, of course, must not be moved out of their accustomed places. Mary saw to that.

Mary was seventeen. She was one of those rare human beings without a selfish impulse in her make-up. Companioning Ma Adams wasn't duty to her; it was love. This was a kind of Eden, this out-of-the-way old country house.

And as though to show how different that other world outside was from the happiness and peace of this one, there was the voice of this man coming in, tuned very low, giving a dramatized news-flash of the day's events.

"It's noon, and the streets outside the Farmers' Bank are filled with the lunch-hour crowd. There are two armed guards on duty in the lobby. A young man steps jauntily in from the street. He's humming as he crosses the marble floor, apparently without a care in the world. He goes to one of the writing slabs along the wall and fills out a deposit slip — well, maybe we'd better call it a withdrawal slip — and he keeps on humming.

"Teller J. P. Smith has just come back from his own lunch, and as he reenters his cage he hears that muffled tune stop in front of his wicket. He reaches for the slip that is handed in to him and scans it. There are just three words on it, short and to the point: *All you've got.* And there's a gun peering at him through the bars. And the man behind it is still humming!

"Then something happens. The guards' suspicions are aroused. As

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they move forward to investigate, they're shot down from behind. Two accomplices have been standing in the doorway, unnoticed. Then the teller is shot down, too, in cold blood, without any excuse. And the last thing the cowed employees of the bank hear, as the murderer backs warily out with his loot to a car at the curb, is that same monotonous tune coming from his lips!

"The Humming Bird, ladies and gentlemen! The cold-blooded, wanton killer who sings at his work. The dying teller told them later, when he regained consciousness for a short while, what the tune was. He recognized it — *St. Louis Blues*. The next time you hear it, remember ——"

"Mary!" Ma Adams said, with what for her was unusual sharpness. "That's the third time I asked you to shut that off. That's not fit stuff for a child your age to hear!"

A click, and there was silence in the room. Slowly the effect of the words wore off, like an evil exhalation finding its way out of the house.

After a while the girl said: "Capitol City. That's where Ben was the last time you heard from him, wasn't it?"

Ma Adams could tell she'd glanced up at the picture on the wall. She'd never seen it herself, but she knew it was there. She dusted it off every day with a special little silk handkerchief, not used for anything else.

"That was nearly two years ago," she said quietly. "I suppose he's moved on somewhere else by now." She sighed a little. Five years was a long time to be alone in the dark. Mary's hand came to rest on her shoulder, pressed down hard.

"That's all right, child," Ma Adams said gratefully. "He wanted to get somewhere, be somebody. I know he has, too. He'll be coming back ——"

Outside on the highway, in the night silence, the hum of a machine in high gear was coming nearer. Few cars came by this way. They sat listening, waiting for it to reach a crescendo and race on by. It reached a crescendo, then stopped dead with a sudden jamming of brakes.

There was a quick step on the porch, then a pounding fist at the front door. Again and again it struck. The whole house seemed to shake with the force of the knocking.

Mary's chair creaked as she jumped up. Ma Adams stayed there, listening, "watching" with her ears. Walls didn't impede her "sight" — she could be in one room and "see" what went on in another, if it was close enough.

Mary's footsteps went hurrying down the hall. A click sounded as she pushed the wall switch that controlled the porch light. The door opened and a voice growled: "Put that out! What's the matter with you?"

The click sounded a second time. Then footsteps heavier than Mary's came toward the room ——

But Ma Adams was on her feet already, arms stretched quiveringly out before her into the dark. The dispossessed cat hit the floor with a soft thud.

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"Ben!" It was just a whispered breath that she uttered.

"Who's here with you?" the man asked. His voice swung around her, so she knew his head had swung with it, as he took in the room.

"Just the two of us, Ben. Mary came a week after you left ——"

But he'd gone back to the door again. "Get him in here. Hurry up!" His voice was directed out into the open. Other footsteps staggered up onto the porch, as though bearing a burden.

"Upstairs!" Ben said curtly, and then, to the girl: "That woodshed still standing around in back?"

"Yes," she answered in a frightened voice.

"Hop in with me and show me the way," he commanded. "Gotta get the car in off the road!"

The heavily weighted footsteps, meanwhile, went toiling up to the floor above. A feeble groan sounded. A voice answered it fiercely: "Shut up, you jinx, or I'll conk you!"

The throbbing of the motor started up again, at the same place where it had stopped. It traveled around the side of the house, faded away across the fields toward the back.

Ma Adams crossed the room to the wall. Her ten fingertips found the cool, smooth glass of the picture. She held them like that, up against it, in a sort of prayer of thanksgiving.

She had turned, and was waiting for his delayed greeting, when he and Mary came in through the back. He gave it to her, a rough, careless stroke of his hand across her silvery hair. "H'ya, old lady?" Strange, curt greeting from that strange outer world that had swallowed him five years before! Such a casual greeting, and after so long a time! Before he had left ——

A chair creaked under him. A match hissed. The unaccustomed fragrance of tobacco smoke drifted toward her. But there was some kind of tension coming from Mary. She could feel it.

"What's the matter, child?" she asked.

"I — I've got blood on the hem of my dress!" the girl gasped.

"That's from the seat of the car," Ben said easily. "We had a little accident, busted the windows. One of the guys with me got hurt a little."

"Maybe we'd better send for Doctor Chase ——" Ma Adams began anxiously.

His voice changed abruptly, cutting her like a whip across the face. "No Doctor Chase and nobody else, get me? We'll take care of him ourselves. We're funny that way."

She edged timidly nearer. "Let me see if you've — you've changed any, Ben," she pleaded.

Her fingertips were her eyes. She reached out, exploring his face with ten feather-light fingers, trembling with emotion. Familiarity came first, familiarity of the contour, the bone structure. Then, dismayingly, strangeness crept in along with it. A smooth, strange coolness, like paraffin, like a wax false face superimposed on his own.

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"It's not you at all!" The wounded cry of distress was wrung from her by that strangeness. "Something's happened to you, Ben!"

He struck her hands down impatiently. "I got scarred in a fight, hadda have it fixed up a little ——"

A voice called down from above, "Get some hot water up here, quick!"

"I'll take it up," Mary said.

"I'll take it up myself," he growled. "You stay here where you are."

After he'd gone, swearing softly to himself, Mary remarked: "That must have been a bad accident they had. The car's got little holes all over it, and all the glass is broken."

Ma Adams did not answer. She just sat staring into the dark, holding her hands to her face. It wasn't him at all. It wasn't the Ben she had sent out into the world so bravely that day years ago! Something had happened to that Ben! Something horrible.

Someone started screaming upstairs, and a door was slammed shut. She could still hear the screams, but after a while they stopped. Then she heard Ben and someone else coming down again. Their voices on the stairs were two husky murmurs that only ears like hers could have detected.

"Looks infected to me."

"If he's gonna croak, why don't he get it over with, instead of holding us up like this!"

They came into the room. Ben said, "This is Bill Johnson, a business partner of mine." A strangled sound, like a suppressed chuckle, came from the other man.

They sat down at the table. Mary's footsteps hurried in and out, bringing the food. But that same impression of tension kept coming from her to Ma's sharp senses. A dish crashed suddenly as it fell out of her hands.

"Quit looking at her!" Ben growled. "What's the matter with you?"

Ma Adams bent her head a little, guiding her food to her mouth. It should have been wonderful, this reunion, after five years, and instead it was all so strange, so — so furtive.

Afterward the groaning started in again from that room above, and one of them went up, though she wasn't sure which of the two it was. There was so much unaccustomed movement around her tonight that, for the first time, her faculties failed her a little, and she couldn't quite keep track of who was about her. She groped for her rocker, sat down in it. The radio was on again, purring softly:

I hate to see
That evenin' sun go down —

"That's right, dear," Ma Adams said, when Mary had come in from the kitchen and the sound had ebbed away. "Turn it off. We don't want to hear any more ——"

"I didn't," the girl said. "It wasn't on at all. That was Ben humming. He just went out of the room."

Ma Adams's head slowly dropped down over her chest, as though she were very sleepy. She was wide-awake, though. But the lids were down over her eyes.

The groans upstairs suddenly sharp-

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ened to a scream, then stopped. Footsteps ran back and forth — she could hear them through the ceiling. Both men were up there.

The girl was suddenly crouched down beside her, shivering. "I'm so frightened," she whimpered.

Ma Adams stroked her hair. It was rumpled and awry. She ran a soothing hand down Mary's face. The silky texture of her skin was gritty. The girl sensed the unasked question.

"I sooted up my face with coal dust," she said. "I mussed up my hair. He — he keeps looking at me so, that friend of Ben's!"

It did not seem at all strange to the two of them that the young girl should come to the blind old lady for protection.

The groaning had stopped upstairs. Ben's steps came running down abruptly, went past them into the kitchen. He moved around in there a little, came out again.

"Looking for something, Ben?" Ma Adams asked.

"Yeah," he said, "I'm looking for a shovel."

There was sudden, nameless horror in the room. That silence upstairs — Ma Adams's arm flashed out around the girl's shoulder.

A harsh, scratchy sound that was her voice forced its way up through her throat after a moment.

"There's one outside, by the back door," she heard herself say.

He closed the room door leading to the stairs. "You two stay in here," he ordered. Then he went out the other way, to the back. They heard him pick up the shovel from against the side of the house, carry it off into the dark with him. His voice trailed off in the deathly stillness.

Feelin' tomorrow
Like I feel today —

There was an abrupt movement of the girl's head, as she turned her face, to hide it against Ma Adams's shoulder.

Little sounds were all that remained. The creak of Ma Adams's rocker. The tick of the clock on the shelf. The distant bite of a shovel into the earth, out in the open field behind the house somewhere . . .

Ben was still humming when he came back twenty minutes later. He did not pass through the room they were in, but went directly up the stairs from the back door.

A bed creaked up above. Then heavy, slower footsteps, two sets of them, started down. They were separated by about a six-foot distance as they passed outside the closed door of the living room. Ma Adams's ears could tell her things like that. Her ears could also make out the slight rustle of a sheet or something trailing along the floor. And like a dirge, very low, someone was humming:

I'll pack my trunk,
Make my getaway —

Ma Adams did something she had possibly never done in all her unseeing years before. She pressed the palms of her hands tightly against her ears, and

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shut them off from the outside world, sealing out sounds that had no right to exist at all.

She removed them about the time the two men were coming back again, Ben and his friend, Bill Johnson. They were both laughing out there in the open, as they came toward the house. She didn't know how long it had been. The girl, Mary, had not moved, but was still cowering there by her side. Ma Adams could feel the beat of the girl's heart. She urged her to her feet, with an upward pressure of the wrists.

"You go up to your room," she breathed. "Go to bed now. That's a good girl. Lock your door on the inside. Don't be frightened; I'll be down here. I'll ——"

The shovel clanged against the boards of the house as it was thrown down. Bill Johnson's voice said, "It's more than he would 'a' done for me."

They came into the kitchen, and tap water rumbled into the sink. "Looka that! Blisters all over me mitts!"

Ben laughed. "Can't take it, huh?"

Ma Adams stretched out a detaining hand toward the hall door, where the girl stood poised for flight. Her voice was almost casual:

"Child, you know more about those things than I, you listen so much to that radio set. How does this *St. Louis Blues* piece go?"

The girl's voice was stifled. "Something about hating to see that evening sun go down!" A frightened sob broke from her. Her footsteps went running lightly up the stairs. A moment later the door of her room slapped shut.

Ma Adams sat there in her rocker, while the men finished washing their hands in the kitchen, rocking slowly, like an automaton. She'd had very little, until now. A son, somewhere, whom she'd been proud of. A son she'd known was going to be a fine, successful, upright man. That had made the darkness easier to bear.

Now she had nothing, nothing at all. That son she'd been proud of was gone. Now the darkness was Stygian, without hope, without consolation.

After a long while a voice penetrated through her misery — how long after she did not know, nor care.

"Where'd the wren go?" It was Bill Johnson's voice.

"Upstairs, to bed," a voice that was hers answered.

"Lay off!" Ben said sharply.

There was an odor of liquor in the room around her. Their voices were a little blurred. Not much, but a little. The cat yowled abruptly, and Johnson's voice said angrily, "Get away from me, Fleas!" as though he had just kicked it.

Ben said pointedly, "You always stay up this late, old-timer?"

She got up without answering and felt her way toward the door.

"No hard feelings," he said. "We've just got a little business we wanta talk over, that's all." And then, as she traced her way expertly along the hall wall toward the stairs, he called after her: "Can you make it?"

They were evidently watching her

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from the doorway. "Great stuff!" she heard Johnson say, surprised into admiration.

She went all the way up, nearly to the top of the stairs, then froze there. To her, it was like being in the same room with them. A bottle clinked against a glass.

"Now that we're rid of him," Johnson said, "what're we hanging around for? Let's get out of this God-forsaken dump! We can make it. Hijack somebody and switch cars, take the first boat we see that looks good. When do we blow?"

"Let's kill two birds with one stone." That was Ben's voice. "There's a pushover they call a bank in the hick town near here. The money they handle is just as good as anyone else's, though. Whaddya say we stop by there in the morning on our way out? All the hayseeds for miles around come in and sock their dough away."

"Ain't we hot enough now?

"That's just it! They won't be expecting us to show for another six months. It'll be a whole lot easier right now than later. 'Get it while the getting's good' is my motto! Then we can really pull down the shades, and keep 'em that way until the heat goes off!"

"O.K., it's a deal," Johnson said. "But it's the last job I pull with you until you get them tonsils of yours taken out! You and that tune you're always humming!"

She heard Ben laugh. "I don't even know I'm doin' it any more. It's like second nature."

They came out into the lower hall, and she crept noiselessly across the upper one, into her room, stood there pressed against the door.

She heard them coming up. "Where do I flop?" Johnson asked.

Ben growled, "What do I care where you flop?"

"I ain't going in there where we had him! Whaddya think I am?"

She tensed as the knob of Mary's door rattled ineffectually in someone's grasp. Then Ben's voice sounded roughly: "C'mon, lay off! There's an empty one down at the end."

Their two doors closed, one after the other. She could still hear them both moving around, even after that, for a little while. Shoes clopped down. A click in the room next to hers, as the light went off. Then another click, minutes later, down at the end of the hall. Then silence.

She stayed there, quiet, listening, while seconds ticked into minutes, and minutes into a half-hour. She didn't know, at first, what she was going to do. What was there she could do?

Even after she had eased her door open and crept back into the hall, she didn't know. There was a small thing, a rite, calling her downstairs. When she got there, she felt for the picture on the wall, unstrung it, took it down. Noiselessly she opened the grate in the kitchen stove, thrust it in, glass and all, where the hot ashes lingered, and replaced the lid.

She had had a son. That was all over with now. There were two ene-

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mies in the house with her. Two enemies who, between them, had shattered the beacon lighting her eternal darkness, had destroyed the only happiness she'd had.

This man who'd come here tonight wasn't her son. Even his face had been changed, molded with paraffin. And now he and his friend were going out tomorrow to rob her fellow townspeople, some of them her lifelong friends; to shoot them down in cold blood as they had already shot others.

She couldn't bring back to life those they had already killed. She couldn't undo the ghastly evil they had committed in the great cities hundreds of miles away from here. But she could prevent their doing it any more. She could put a stop to it from now on. And thus it came to her slowly what it was she must do.

She went outside through the kitchen door. Slowly she groped her way around the house, one hand out against its boards to guide her. The heavy shutters of every lower-floor window she drew together, latched on the outside. Then she went in again. The kitchen door was half-glass, but she locked the outer storm door over it securely, drew the key out, threw it in the stove.

Then she went back to the upper hall again, soundlessly, step by cautious step. It was easy for her to move quietly. The darkness was no obstacle, for she was always in darkness. Their heavy breathing, in their respective rooms, was so audible out here.

Wraithlike, a shadow without substance for all the sound she made, she went down the hall. She went to Johnson's room first, found the knob with the silent tips of her fingers, turned it, opened just wide enough to admit her.

She knew where the bed was in here, but she must be careful, for he might have moved the rocker out of place. She dropped to her hands and knees and crawled across the floor in a straight, unwavering line toward the bed. He *had* moved the chair out of line, and she would have tripped and fallen over it had she been upright. Her padding hand came to rest on one of its curved bases when she least expected it. She gripped it, held it motionless.

Kneeling there beside it, her hands went over the tumbled clothes he had tossed onto it. She didn't know much about those things — those weapons that shot people down. But she knew they must have them somewhere, even when they slept.

It wasn't with the clothes on the chair. Maybe he kept it on his body, even in bed at night. Maybe under the pillow . . .

The thought of turning back never even occurred to her. She had set out to do something, and there is no patience so terrible as that of the helpless.

It wasn't on him anywhere. He turned restlessly in his liquor-ridden sleep under the insect-lightness of her fumbling hands. She crouched there below the bed, waiting for him to settle back into heavy slumber again.

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She had never known the human hand could be made so flat, so spade-like, as when hers prodded here and there, under the mattress he lay on, under the very pillow his head rested on. Nothing. Despair then settled on her briefly. She must have these implements of death. Not for her own safety — that didn't count with her — but because they were the only arguments these two men understood, respected, could be made to obey.

And then, as she rose to move back a little, something heavy brushed her shoulder. Something hanging from the head of the bed — there within her reach the whole time.

She felt a leather holster, weighted down, fumbled with it, drew out what it contained, hid it in the folds of her apron. Back at the door again, clutching it tightly to her with one hand, she changed the key over to the outside, turned it, drew it out.

She hid the trophy in her own room, in a place they'd never find, even with their unimpaired eyes, then went into Ben's room. This time it was easier, for she knew where to look for the gun. He never even stirred, but it took time, lots of time. She took the key out of his door, too, after she'd locked it. Then she went across the hall and pecked with her nails at the girl's door.

There was a quick movement, a whispered "Who's there?" Mary had been awake. Ma Adams had known she would be. She put her lips close to the keyhole. "Open. Open, dear," she breathed hurriedly.

The door moved back, and she heard Mary's frightened breathing.

"Get on your things. Come downstairs. I'll be waiting at the front door. Sh, don't make a sound now!"

The girl knew enough not to use the lights. Ma Adams still had the second gun hidden in her apron, as she stood by the front door, when Mary groped her way down the unlighted stairs toward her. Ma Adams reached out, thrust a copper penny into the girl's hand.

"Remember what that electrician explained, that time we had the trouble with the lights? Dear, would you be afraid to drop this behind the master switch in the fuse box? Light a match. Don't hold it in your hand; just drop it and close the switch on it. Careful, child, that you don't burn yourself."

The girl didn't ask her why she wanted it done. There was a low *phut!* from the kitchen, as the fuses blew out under the short circuit the penny made, and she heard Mary jump hurriedly back. The odds would be more even now between Ma Adams and her enemies. At least, until dawn came.

When the girl had slipped back to where she waited, Ma Adams gripped her by the shoulder. "Can you drive that car they put in the woodshed?"

"I — I think so."

"Then drive it into town and come back with help. Get the State police."

"And you ——"

Ma Adams unwrapped the gun. A sudden intake of breath told her the

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girl had seen what it was, even in the dark.

"I'll stay here," she said. "Otherwise they'll just go out and kill more people. I don't want them to do that. I'll keep them here."

"But Ben's — your son," the girl faltered.

Ma Adams didn't answer for a moment. Finally she said: "I want him to go straight. That's all I have left now. You have to pay for the things you do. There isn't any other way."

She pushed the girl gently but firmly through the open door. "Hurry, dear. I'll wait here by the door. The windows and the back door are locked, and all the shutters are closed. There isn't any other way for them to get out. I'm not afraid. But hurry. Don't take too long."

The girl's running steps died out around the side of the house. Ma Adams locked the heavy outer door, took the key out, thrust it into the top of her shoe. Then she stood there, waiting, with her back to the door, awkwardly holding the unaccustomed gun with both hands.

The muffled whine of the car sounded, slowly rounding the house to get back on the highway. The girl was driving it carefully, to make as little noise as possible. Ma Adams could tell when it had reached the level macadam, for there was less jogging.

Then suddenly, sickeningly, it backfired. A shattering report tore the quiet night to pieces. Instantly after, the machine sped off, straight and true, toward town. The sound of it died down in the distance.

But already the first preliminary knob-wrenchings from the doors upstairs had changed to a violent battering of feet and fists against the panels. Ma Adams stood motionless where she was, her head lowered as if she was looking at the floor.

Johnson's voice came down to her clearly.

"Hummer! Where are you? I'm locked in here, and my rod's been lifted!"

Ben's voice came back. "Me, too! Hit it with a chair. They've lammed out with the car. We gotta get outa here!"

She heard the terrific crash of a chair lifted bodily against one of the panels. The chair shattered and there was a sound of sticks falling all over the floor. Good old house, with its strong, solid doors, thought Ma Adams.

Mary couldn't get to town and back under three-quarters of an hour. Before she could get some men together it would be well over an hour. It didn't matter much. He was going to go straight, this enemy who had changed places with her son; he was going to go straight. That was the only way she could get her son back again.

The din upstairs increased. They were like a couple of caged bears on a rampage. She heard the footsteps of one retreat to the far end of the room, then come lunging at the door. The

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impact seemed to shake the whole house. He did it a second time, and a third. Then suddenly there was a sound like a giant firecracker, and she heard a section of the door slap back against the wall outside. He'd got out!

She took a deep breath, straightened; the back of her shoulders found the door behind her, pressed flat against it. She didn't know which of the two men it was. There was a momentary lull, after the terrible din that had been going on. Stealthy footsteps moved about up there. She tensed, waiting. But they didn't come down. They went into one of the other rooms, came out again. Two shots went off in rapid succession, with a sound of metal flying apart. The second door flung open, with a curse.

"That did it," one of them said in a low, hoarse voice. "They overlooked Shorty's rod, in the other room! C'mon, I'm taking a powder outa this place, before we have the whole works down on our necks!"

Their voices mingled; they snarled words to each other that Ma Adams could not catch. Suddenly, fear and anger had made their voices strangely similar — both low, hoarse, animal-like. She could not even be certain now which was which.

Footsteps, one set of them, came to the head of the stairs, started down, close to the wall, with an awkward hesitancy Ma Adams's own never had. Whoever was descending couldn't see his way. The blind stalking the blind! She was holding the gun out straight toward the sound, one finger around the trigger, supporting the heavy barrel on the palm of her other hand.

There came a tiny click, not as loud as a light switch would make; it was the sound of a flashlight turned on, directed toward her. The momentary hitch in the oncoming tread told her she had been seen by the prowler.

Ma Adams stiffened.

"Is that you, son?" she said calmly. "Don't come any nearer or I'll shoot."

The steps started again, very slowly, very heavily, as if someone was fixing his gaze so intently on her he had forgotten to walk softly.

"Drop that gun, old lady!" The words were a mere thread of whispered snarl. "Or I'll plug you!" Which of them had spoken she could not tell. But she did not lower the gun she held.

"Don't!" the other voice rasped flatly. "You can't shoot her! She's blind and she's my ——"

There was a sound of footsteps, as of someone leaping forward. Another sound, as something hard struck momentarily against a banister. Then a gun went off for the third time in that house that night.

There was a thud from the plaster ceiling over the stairs. Something came clattering, skittering down from above, landing nearly at her feet. She found it with the toe of her shoe, kicked it off to one side. Flat and heavy, it was, and made of metal.

The staircase was creaking, whining, with two heavy bodies struggling on it. And now Ma Adams was trembling

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all over, as she stood there with her back pressed against the locked door. Her son was fighting for her! Risking his life for her. He was her son once more, the son she had lost, and she was proud of him again. The one light in her darkness was flickering back to life.

There was a wild yelp, of fright, of terror and pain, and something tumbled heavily down the long stairway. Rolling, falling, all the way to the bottom, to lie there still, without sound. A heavy breath or two, and then even that had stopped.

After a long, stunned interval, shaky footsteps started down toward her once more from above. She let them come on, past the halfway mark, all the way to the bottom, past the obstacle that lay there at the foot of the stairs. She held the gun poised rigidly at the sound. She didn't ask who it was. She didn't need to.

A low hum came toward her, a mere thread of sound.

Got a heart like a rock cast
in the sea —

A hand came to rest on the muzzle of the gun, slowly shifted it aside.

"Mother," a whispered breath in her ear said, so faintly that only she could have heard the words, "let me out. I've got to go. But I'm going — straight."

Her fingers fumbled at the key. Someone brushed past her, then the door closed, and she was alone once more. But now she had her happiness back, her pride — the lamp that had lit her lonely darkness for so long, and would light it now again.

They came more quickly than she'd expected, the men Mary had brought. Cars braked to a stop outside, excited voices, hurried footsteps on the porch.

She was still standing there with her back to the door. It was unlocked now. Their opening of it brushed her lightly aside. She was still holding the gun, but it was pointed downward at the floor now. She could tell they were bending over what lay there in the hall before her.

"One of them got away, eh?" somebody said to her. "Which way did he go?"

Another voice said, "She can't tell you; she's ——"

"Yes," Ma Adams said, "I can tell you which way he went. He went straight."

She stood aside, to let them carry the dead man out of the house. She didn't attempt to touch his face as he went by. What was he to her? A stranger, an enemy? She had no interest in him. So they carried him out and through the glare of the headlights of the car that stood there.

"He's gone straight," she whispered gladly to herself, and did not hear the sudden gasp from Mary, in the yard, as the light fell on the dead man's face.

But she was right, for it was Ben, and he had gone straight at last.

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VINCENT STARRETT SELECTS . . .

To refresh your memory: We asked a special panel of experts, consisting of James Hilton, Howard Haycraft, John Dickson Carr, Anthony Boucher, Vincent Starrett, James Sandoe, August Derleth, Viola Brothers Shore, Lee Wright, Lew D. Feldman, Charles Honce, and your Editors (acting as twelfth talesmen), to select the finest detective short stories ever written — the crème de la *crime, the best of all time. Among 83 stories chosen, a dozen stood out as supreme favorites. Here is* THE GOLDEN DOZEN:

The Hands of Mr. Ottermole	by Thomas Burke
The Purloined Letter	by Edgar A. Poe
The Red-Headed League	by A. Conan Doyle
The Avenging Chance	by Anthony Berkeley
The Absent-Minded Coterie	by Robert Barr
The Problem of Cell 13	by Jacques Futrelle
The Oracle of the Dog	by G. K. Chesterton
Naboth's Vineyard	by Melville Davisson Post
The Gioconda Smile	by Aldous Huxley
The Yellow Slugs	by H. C. Bailey
The Genuine Tabard	by E. C. Bentley
Suspicion	by Dorothy L. Sayers

Two months ago we brought you Thomas Burke's "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole," sponsored by Anthony Boucher; last month Howard Haycraft sponsored Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter"; and now Vincent Starrett stands for A. Conan Doyle's "The Red-Headed League."

As in the cases of Anthony Boucher and Howard Haycraft, Vincent Starrett surely needs no introduction to readers of EQMM. Mr. Starrett is recognized all over the world as the unofficial biographer of Sherlock Holmes. His work in the field of Sherlockian criticism has been stupendous. A charter member of the Baker Street Irregulars, founder and grand, exalted Needle of the Hounds of the Baskerville [sic], *Chicago scion society of BSI, author of* THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, *associate editor of "The Baker Street Journal," Vincent Starrett has done more to keep the flame of Holmes eternal, to keep the nostalgia forever green, than any other single person who ever lived — excepting only Dr. Watson himself.*

Mr. Starrett's accomplishments are legion: a life-long student and historian of manhunting fiction — he wrote the current articles on "Mystery Stories" and "Detective Stories" for the Encyclopedia Britannica; author

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of six detective novels and more than one hundred mystery short stories, including the saga of Jimmie Lavender; author of about forty books in all departments of literature, with particular emphasis on literary criticism and the history of books — he is a bookman who writes more charmingly and more catholically about books than anyone we know; a bibliophile with a special predilection for detective-story first editions; columnist for "The Chicago Sunday Tribune" — his "Books Alive" is the livest column of its kind; editor of some of the writings of Charles Dickens, Robert Louis Stevenson, Stephen Crane, George Gissing, and Mark Twain; compiler of the standard bibliographies of Stephen Crane and Ambrose Bierce; a superb anthologist, a true connoisseur —

Vincent Starrett ended his Who's Who with "I am afraid that is about all." By the shade of Sherrington Hope, isn't that enough! Whom do you know who can match, let alone top, that distinguished record of achievement?

Now, here is Vincent Starrett's personal list of favorite stories:

The Red-Headed League	by A. Conan Doyle
The Murders in the Rue Morgue	by Edgar A. Poe
The Hands of Mr. Ottermole	by Thomas Burke
The Avenging Chance	by Anthony Berkeley
The Blue Cross	by G. K. Chesterton
The Infallible Godahl	by Frederick Irving Anderson
The New Administration	by Melville Davisson Post
The Farewell Murder	by Dashiell Hammett
Back for Christmas	by John Collier
A Passage to Benares	by T. S. Stribling
The Long Dinner	by H. C. Bailey
The Case of Oscar Brodski	by R. Austin Freeman

So, under the perfect sponsorship of Vincent Starrett, we now offer you the greatest of all the Sherlock Holmes short stories — in the consensus of opinion of our Blue Ribbon Jury of experts. Here is "one of the most singular" cases ever adventured and memoired — "the facts are . . . unique" — indeed, it is "a three-pipe problem" without a semblance of doitle. In it you will meet "Holmes the sleuth-hound, Holmes the relentless, keen-witted, ready-handed criminal agent." And at the end you will not only find the solution to the mystery but also the answer to to that 109-year-old question: Why do people read detective stories? Sherlock Holmes replies: "To escape from the commonplaces of existence" — and can you deny its simple, unarguable truth?

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THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE

by A. CONAN DOYLE

I HAD CALLED upon my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, one day in the autumn of last year, and found him in deep conversation with a very stout, florid-faced elderly gentleman, with fiery red hair. With an apology for my intrusion I was about to withdraw, when Holmes pulled me abruptly into the room and closed the door behind me.

"You could not possibly have come at a better time, my dear Watson," he said, cordially.

"I was afraid that you were engaged."

"So I am. Very much so."

"Then I can wait in the next room."

"Not at all. This gentleman, Mr. Wilson, has been my partner and helper in many of my most successful cases, and I have no doubt that he will be of the utmost use to me in yours also."

The stout gentleman half rose from his chair and gave a bob of greeting, with a quick little questioning glance from his small, fat-encircled eyes.

"Try the settee," said Holmes, relapsing into his armchair, and putting his fingertips together, as was his custom when in judicial moods. "I know, my dear Watson, that you share my love of all that is bizarre and outside the conventions and humdrum routine of everyday life. You have shown your relish for it by the enthusiasm which has prompted you to chronicle, and, if you will excuse my saying so, somewhat to embellish so many of my own little adventures."

"Your cases have indeed been of the greatest interest to me," I observed.

"You will remember that I remarked the other day, just before we went into the very simple problem presented by Miss Mary Sutherland, that for strange effects and extraordinary combinations we must go to life itself, which is always far more daring than any effort of the imagination."

"A proposition which I took the liberty of doubting."

"You did, doctor, but none the less you must come round to my view, for otherwise I shall keep on piling fact upon fact on you, until your reason breaks down under them and acknowledges me to be right. Now, Mr. Jabez Wilson here has been good enough to call upon me this morning, and to begin a narrative which promises to be one of the most singular which I have listened to for some time. You have heard me remark that the strangest and most unique things are very often connected not with the larger but with the smaller crimes, and occasionally, indeed, where there is room for doubt whether any positive crime has been committed. As far as I have

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heard, it is impossible for me to say whether the present case is an instance of crime or not, but the course of events is certainly among the most singular that I have ever listened to. Perhaps, Mr. Wilson, you would have the great kindness to recommence your narrative. I ask you, not merely because my friend, Dr. Watson, has not heard the opening part, but also because the peculiar nature of the story makes me anxious to have every possible detail from your lips. As a rule, when I have heard some slight indication of the course of events I am able to guide myself by the thousands of other similar cases which occur to my memory. In the present instance I am forced to admit that the facts are, to the best of my belief, unique."

The portly client puffed out his chest with an appearance of some little pride, and pulled a dirty and wrinkled newspaper from the inside pocket of his greatcoat. As he glanced down the advertisement column, with his head thrust forward, and the paper flattened out upon his knee, I took a good look at the man, and endeavored, after the fashion of my companion, to read the indications which might be presented by his dress or appearance.

I did not gain very much, however, by my inspection. Our visitor bore every mark of being an average commonplace British tradesman, obese, pompous, and slow. He wore rather baggy, gray, shepherd's-check trousers, a not over-clean black frock-coat, unbuttoned in the front, and a drab waistcoat with a heavy brassy Albert chain, and a square pierced bit of metal dangling down as an ornament. A frayed top hat and a faded brown overcoat with a wrinkled velvet collar lay upon a chair beside him. Altogether, look as I would, there was nothing remarkable about the man save his blazing red head and the expression of extreme chagrin and discontent upon his features.

Sherlock Holmes's quick eye took in my occupation, and he shook his head with a smile as he noticed my questioning glances. "Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labor, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been in China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing else."

Mr. Jabez Wilson started up in his chair, with his forefinger upon the paper, but his eyes upon my companion.

"How, in the name of good fortune, did you know all that, Mr. Holmes?" he asked. "How did you know, for example, that I did manual labor? It's as true as gospel, for I began as a ship's carpenter."

"Your hands, my dear sir. Your right hand is quite a size larger than your left. You have worked with it and the muscles are more developed."

"Well, the snuff, then, and the Freemasonry?"

"I won't insult your intelligence by telling you how I read that, especially as, rather against the strict rules of your order, you use an arc-and-compass breastpin."

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"Ah, of course, I forgot that. But the writing?"

"What else can be indicated by that right cuff so very shiny for five inches, and the left one with the smooth patch near the elbow where you rest it upon the desk."

"Well, but China?"

"The fish which you have tattooed immediately above your wrist could only have been done in China. I have made a small study of tattoo marks, and have even contributed to the literature of the subject. That trick of staining the fishes' scales a delicate pink is quite peculiar to China. When, in addition, I see a Chinese coin hanging from your watch-chain, the matter becomes even more simple."

Mr. Jabez Wilson laughed heavily. "Well, I never!" said he. "I thought at first that you had done something clever, but I see that there was nothing in it after all."

"I begin to think, Watson," said Holmes, "that I make a mistake in explaining. '*Omne ignotum pro magnifico*,' you know, and my poor little reputation, such as it is, will suffer shipwreck if I am so candid. Can you not find the advertisement, Mr. Wilson?"

"Yes, I have got it now," he answered, with his thick, red finger planted halfway down the column. "Here it is. This is what began it all."

I took the paper from him and read as follows:

"To the Red-Headed League: On account of the bequest of the late Ezekiah Hopkins, of Lebanon, Pa., U.S.A., there is now another vacancy open which entitles a member of the League to a salary of four pounds a week for purely nominal services. All red-headed men who are sound in body and mind and above the age of twenty-one years are eligible. Apply in person on Monday, at eleven o'clock, to Duncan Ross, at the offices of the League, 7 Pope's Court, Fleet Street."

"What on earth does this mean?" I ejaculated, after I had twice read over the extraordinary announcement.

Holmes chuckled and wriggled in his chair, as was his habit when in high spirits. "It is a little off the beaten track, isn't it?" said he. "And now, Mr. Wilson, off you go at scratch, and tell us all about yourself, your household, and the effect which this advertisement had upon your fortunes. You will first make a note, doctor, of the paper and the date."

"It is *The Morning Chronicle* of April 27, 1890. Just two months ago."

"Very good. Now, Mr. Wilson."

"Well, it is just as I have been telling you, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said Jabez Wilson, mopping his forehead, "I have a small pawnbroker's business at Coburg Square, near the City. It's not a very large affair, and of late years it has not done more than just give me a living. I used to be able to keep two assistants, but now I only keep one; and I would have a job to pay him but that he is willing to come for half-wages to learn the business."

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"What is the name of this obliging youth?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

"His name is Vincent Spaulding, and he's not such a youth either. It's hard to say his age. I should not wish a smarter assistant, Mr. Holmes; and I know very well that he could better himself, and earn twice what I am able to give him. But, after all, if he is satisfied, why should I put ideas in his head?"

"Why, indeed? You seem most fortunate in having an employee who comes under the full market price. It is not a common experience among employers in this age. I don't know that your assistant is not as remarkable as your advertisement."

"Oh, he has his faults, too," said Mr. Wilson. "Never was such a fellow for photography. Snapping away with a camera when he ought to be improving his mind, and then diving down into the cellar like a rabbit into its hole to develop his pictures. That is his main fault; but, on the whole, he's a good worker. There's no vice in him."

"He is still with you, I presume?"

"Yes, sir. He and a girl of fourteen, who does a bit of simple cooking, and keeps the place clean — that's all I have in the house, for I am a widower, and never had any family. We live very quietly, sir, the three of us; and we keep a roof over our heads, and we pay our debts, if we do nothing more.

"The first thing that put us out was that advertisement. Spaulding, he came down into the office just this day eight weeks, with this very paper in his hand, and he says:

" 'I wish to the Lord, Mr. Wilson, that I was a red-headed man.'

" 'Why that?' I asks.

" 'Why,' says he, 'here's another vacancy in the League of the Red-Headed Men. It's worth quite a little fortune to any man who gets it, and I understand that there are more vacancies than there are men, so that the trustees are at their wits' end what to do with the money. If my hair would only change color here's a nice little crib all ready for me.'

" 'Why, what is it, then?' I asked. You see, Mr. Holmes, I am a very stay-at-home man, and, as my business came to me instead of my having to go to it, I was often weeks on end without putting my foot over the door-mat. In that way I didn't know much of what was going on outside, and I was always glad of a bit of news.

" 'Have you never heard of the League of the Red-Headed Men?' he asked, with his eyes open.

" 'Never.'

" 'Why, I wonder at that, for you are eligible yourself for one of the vacancies.'

" 'And what are they worth?'

" 'Oh, merely a couple of hundred a year, but the work is slight, and it need not interfere very much with one's other occupations.'

"Well, you can easily think that that made me prick up my ears, for the business has not been over good for some years, and an extra couple of hundred would have been very handy.

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" 'Tell me all about it,' said I.

" 'Well,' said he, showing me the advertisement, 'you can see for yourself that the League has a vacancy, and there is the address where you should apply for particulars. As far as I can make out, the League was founded by an American millionaire, Ezekiah Hopkins, who was very peculiar in his ways. He was himself red-headed, and he had a great sympathy for all red-headed men; so, when he died, it was found that he had left his enormous fortune in the hands of trustees, with instructions to apply the interest to the providing of easy berths to men whose hair is of that color. From all I hear it is splendid pay, and very little to do.'

" 'But,' said I, 'there would be millions of red-headed men who would apply.'

" 'Not so many as you might think,' he answered. 'You see it is really confined to Londoners, and to grown men. This American had started from London where he was young, and he wanted to do the old town a good turn. Then, again, I have heard it is no use applying if your hair is light red, or dark red, or anything but real, bright, blazing, fiery red. Now, if you cared to apply, Mr. Wilson, you would just walk in; but perhaps it would hardly be worth your while to put yourself out of the way for the sake of a few hundred pounds.'

"Now it is a fact, gentlemen, as you may see for yourselves, that my hair is of a very full and rich tint, so that it seemed to me that, if there was to be any competition in the matter, I stood as good a chance as any man that I had ever met. Vincent Spaulding seemed to know so much about it that I thought he might prove useful, so I just ordered him to put up the shutters for the day, and to come right away with me. He was very willing to have a holiday, so we shut the business up, and started off for the address that was given us in the advertisement.

"I never hope to see such a sight as that again, Mr. Holmes. From north, south, east, and west every man who had a shade of red in his hair had tramped into the City to answer the advertisement. Fleet Street was choked with red-headed folk, and Pope's Court looked like a coster's orange barrow. I should not have thought there were so many in the whole country as were brought together by that single advertisement. Every shade of color they were — straw, lemon, orange, brick, Irish-setter, liver, clay; but, as Spaulding said, there were not many who had the real vivid flame-colored tint. When I saw how many were waiting, I would have given it up in despair; but Spaulding would not hear of it. How he did it I could not imagine, but he pushed and pulled and butted until he got me through the crowd, and right up to the steps which led to the office. There was a double stream upon the stair, some going up in hope, and some coming back dejected; but we wedged in as well as we could, and soon found ourselves in the office."

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"Your experience has been a most entertaining one," remarked Holmes, as his client paused and refreshed his memory with a huge pinch of snuff. "Pray continue your very interesting statement."

"There was nothing in the office but a couple of wooden chairs and a deal table, behind which sat a small man, with a head that was even redder than mine. He said a few words to each candidate as he came up, and then he always managed to find some fault in them which would disqualify them. Getting a vacancy did not seem to be such a very easy matter after all. However, when our turn came, the little man was much more favorable to me than to any of the others, and he closed the door as we entered, so that he might have a private word with us.

" 'This is Mr. Jabez Wilson,' said my assistant, 'and he is willing to fill a vacancy in the League.'

" 'And he is admirably suited for it,' the other answered. 'He has every requirement. I cannot recall when I have seen anything so fine.' He took a step backward, cocked his head on one side, and gazed at my hair until I felt quite bashful. Then suddenly he plunged forward, wrung my hand, and congratulated me warmly.

" 'It would be injustice to hesitate,' said he. 'You will, however, I am sure, excuse me for taking an obvious precaution.' With that he seized my hair in both his hands, and tugged until I yelled with the pain. 'There is water in your eyes,' said he, as he released me. 'I perceive that all is as it should be. But we have to be careful, for we have twice been deceived by wigs and once by paint. I could tell you tales of cobbler's wax which would disgust you with human nature.' He stepped over to the window and shouted through it at the top of his voice that the vacancy was filled. A groan of disappointment came up from below, and the folk all trooped away in different directions, until there was not a red head to be seen except my own and that of the manager.

" 'My name,' said he, 'is Mr. Duncan Ross, and I am myself one of the pensioners upon the fund left by our noble benefactor. Are you a married man, Mr. Wilson? Have you a family?'

"I answered that I had not.

"His face fell immediately.

" 'Dear me!' he said, gravely, 'that is very serious indeed. I am sorry to hear you say that. The fund was, of course, for the propagation and spread of the redheads as well as for their maintenance. It is exceedingly unfortunate that you should be a bachelor.'

"My face lengthened at this, Mr. Holmes, for I thought that I was not to have the vacancy after all; but, after thinking it over for a few minutes, he said that it would be all right.

" 'In the case of another,' said he, 'the objection might be fatal, but we must stretch a point in favor of a man with such a head of hair as yours. When shall you be able to enter upon your new duties?'

" 'Well, it is a little awkward, for

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I do have a business already,' said I.

" 'Oh, never mind about that, Mr. Wilson!' said Vincent Spaulding. 'I shall be able to look after that.'

" 'What would be the hours?' I asked.

" 'Ten to two.'

"Now a pawnbroker's business is mostly done of an evening, Mr. Holmes, especially Thursday and Friday evenings, which is just before payday; so it would suit me very well to earn a little in the mornings. Besides, I knew that my assistant was a good man, and that he would see to anything that turned up.

" 'That would suit me very well,' said I. 'And the pay?'

" 'Is four pounds a week.'

" 'And the work?'

" 'Is purely nominal.'

" 'What do you call purely nominal?'

" 'Well, you have to be in the office, or at least in the building, the whole time. If you leave, you forfeit your whole position forever. The will is very clear upon that point. You don't comply with the conditions if you budge from the office during that time.'

" 'It's only four hours a day, and I should not think of leaving,' said I.

" 'No excuse will avail,' said Mr. Duncan Ross. 'Neither sickness, nor business, nor anything else. There you must stay, or you lose your billet.'

" 'And the work?'

" 'Is to copy out the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. There is the first volume of it in that press. You must find your own ink, pens, and blotting-paper, but we provide this table and chair. Will you be ready tomorrow?'

" 'Certainly,' I answered.

" 'Then, goodbye, Mr. Jabez Wilson, and let me congratulate you once more on the important position which you have been fortunate enough to gain.' He bowed me out of the room, and I went home with my assistant hardly knowing what to say or do, I was so pleased at my own good fortune.

"Well, I thought over the matter all day, and by evening I was in low spirits again; for I had quite persuaded myself that the whole affair must be some great hoax or fraud, though what its object might be I could not imagine. It seemed altogether past belief that anyone could make such a will, or that they would pay such a sum for doing anything so simple as copying out the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Vincent Spaulding did what he could to cheer me up, but by bedtime I had reasoned myself out of the whole thing. However, in the morning I determined to have a look at it anyhow, so I bought a penny bottle of ink, and with a quill pen and seven sheets of foolscap paper I started off for Pope's Court.

"Well, to my surprise and delight everything was as right as possible. The table was set out ready for me, and Mr. Duncan Ross was there to see that I got fairly to work. He started me off upon the letter A, and then he left me; but he would drop in from time to time to see that all was right with me. At two o'clock he bade me

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good-da , complimented me upon the amount that I had written, and then locked the door of the office after me.

"This went on day after day, Mr. Holmes, and on Saturday the manager came in and planked down four golden sovereigns for my week's work. It was the same next week, and the same the week after. Every morning I was there, at ten, and every afternoon I left at two. By degrees Mr. Duncan Ross took to coming in only once of a morning, and then, after a time, he did not come in at all. Still, of course, I never dared to leave the room for an instant, for I was not sure when he might come, and the billet was such a good one, and suited me so well, that I would not risk the loss of it.

"Eight weeks passed away like this, and I had written about Abbots, and Archery, and Armor, and Architecture and Attica, and hoped with diligence that I might get on to the B's before very long. It cost me something in foolscap, and I had pretty nearly filled a shelf with my writings. And then suddenly the whole business came to an end."

"To an end?"

"Yes, sir. And no later than this morning. I went to my work as usual at ten o'clock, but the door was shut and locked, with a little square of cardboard hammered onto the middle of the panel with a tack. Here it is, and you can read what it says for yourself."

He held up a piece of white cardboard, about the size of a sheet of note-paper. It read in this fashion:

THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE DISSOLVED.

Oct. 9, 1890.

Sherlock Holmes and I surveyed this curt announcement and the rueful face behind it, until the comical side of the affair so completely overtopped every consideration that we both burst out into a roar of laughter.

"I cannot see that there is anything very funny," cried our client, flushing up to the roots of his flaming hair. "If you can do nothing better than laugh at me, I can go elsewhere."

"No, no," cried Holmes, shoving him back into the chair from which he had half risen. "I really wouldn't miss your case for the world. It is most refreshingly unusual. But there is, if you will excuse my saying so, something just a little funny about it. Pray what steps did you take when you found the card upon the door?"

"I was staggered, sir. I did not know what to do. Then I called at the offices round, but none of them seemed to know anything about it. Finally, I went to the landlord, who is an accountant living on the ground floor, and I asked him if he could tell me what had become of the Red-Headed League. He said that he had never heard of any such body. Then I asked him who Mr. Duncan Ross was. He said that the name was new to him.

" 'Well,' said I, 'the gentleman at No. 4.'

" 'What, the red-headed man?'

" 'Yes.'

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" 'Oh,' said he, 'his name was William Morris. He was a solicitor, and was using my room as a temporary convenience until his new premises were ready. He moved out yesterday.'

" 'Where could I find him?'

" 'Oh, at his new offices. He did tell me the address. Yes, 17 King Edward Street, near St. Paul's.'

"I started off, Mr. Holmes, but when I got to that address it was a manufactory of artificial knee-caps, and no one in it had ever heard of either Mr. William Morris or Mr. Duncan Ross."

"And what did you do then?" asked Holmes.

"I went home to Saxe-Coburg Square, and I asked the advice of my assistant. But he could not help me in any way. He could only say that if I waited I should hear by post. But that was not quite good enough, Mr. Holmes. I did not wish to lose such a place without a struggle, so, as I had heard that you were good enough to give advice to poor folk who were in need of it, I came right away to you."

"And you did very wisely," said Holmes. "Your case is an exceedingly remarkable one, and I shall be happy to look into it. From what you have told me I think that it is possible that graver issues hang from it than might at first sight appear."

"Grave enough!" said Mr. Jabez Wilson. "Why, I have lost four pound a week."

"As far as you are personally concerned," remarked Holmes, "I do not see that you have any grievance against this extraordinary league. On the contrary, you are, as I understand, richer by some thirty pounds, to say nothing of the minute knowledge which you have gained on every subject which comes under the letter A. You have lost nothing by them."

"No, sir. But I want to find out about them, and who they are, and what their object was in playing this prank — if it was a prank — upon me. It was a pretty expensive joke for them, for it cost them two-and-thirty pounds."

"We shall endeavor to clear up these points for you. And, first, one or two questions, Mr. Wilson. This assistant of yours who first called your attention to the advertisement — how long had he been with you?"

"About a month then."

"How did he come?"

"In answer to an advertisement."

"Was he the only applicant?"

"No, I had a dozen."

"Why did you pick him?"

"Because he was handy and would come cheap."

"At half-wages, in fact."

"Yes."

"What is he like, this Vincent Spaulding?"

"Small, stout-built, very quick in his ways, no hair on his face, though he's not short of thirty. Has a white splash of acid upon his forehead."

Holmes sat up in his chair, in considerable excitement. "I thought as much," said he. "Have you ever observed that his ears are pierced for earrings?"

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"Yes, sir. He told me that a gypsy had done it for him when he was a lad."

"Hum!" said Holmes, sinking back in deep thought. "He is still with you?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I have only just left him."

"And has your business been attended to in your absence?"

"Nothing to complain of, sir. There's never very much to do of a morning."

"That will do, Mr. Wilson. I shall be happy to give you an opinion upon the subject in the course of a day or two. Today is Saturday, and I hope that by Monday we may come to a conclusion."

"Well, Watson," said Holmes, when our visitor had left us, "what do you make of it all?"

"I make nothing of it," I answered, frankly. "It is a most mysterious business."

"As a rule," said Holmes, "the more bizarre a thing is the less mysterious it proves to be. It is your commonplace, featureless crimes which are really puzzling, just as a commonplace face is the most difficult to identify. But I must be prompt over this matter."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"To smoke," he answered. "It is quite a three-pipe problem, and I beg that you won't speak to me for fifty minutes." He curled himself up in his chair, with his thin knees drawn up to his hawk-like nose, and there he sat with his eyes closed and his black clay pipe thrusting out like the bill of some strange bird. I had come to the conclusion that he had dropped asleep, and indeed was nodding myself, when he suddenly sprang out of his chair with the gesture of a man who has made up his mind, and put his pipe down upon the mantelpiece.

"Sarasate plays at St. James's Hall this afternoon," he remarked. "What do you think, Watson? Could your patients spare you for a few hours?"

"I have nothing to do today. My practice is never very absorbing."

"Then put on your hat and come. I am going through the City first, and we can have some lunch on the way. I observe that there is a good deal of German music on the program, which is rather more to my taste than Italian or French. It is introspective, and I want to introspect. Come along!"

We traveled by the Underground as far as Aldersgate; and a short walk took us to Saxe-Coburg Square, the scene of the singular story which we had listened to in the morning. It was a poky, little, shabby-genteel place, where four lines of dingy, two-storied brick houses looked out into a small railed-in inclosure, where a lawn of weedy grass, and a few clumps of faded laurel bushes made a hard fight against a smoke-laden and uncongenial atmosphere. Three gilt balls and a brown board with JABEZ WILSON in white letters, upon a corner house, announced the place where our red-headed client carried on his business.

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Sherlock Holmes stopped in front of it with his head on one side, and looked it all over, with his eyes shining brightly between puckered lids. Then he walked slowly up the street, and then down again to the corner, still looking keenly at the houses. Finally he returned to the pawnbroker's and, having thumped vigorously upon the pavement with his stick two or three times, he went up to the door and knocked. It was instantly opened by a bright-looking, clean-shaven young fellow, who asked him to step in.

"Thank you," said Holmes, "I only wished to ask you how you would go from here to the Strand."

"Third right, four left," answered the assistant, promptly, closing the door.

"Smart fellow, that," observed Holmes as we walked away. "He is, in my judgment, the fourth smartest man in London, and for daring I am not sure that he has not a claim to be third. I have known something of him before."

"Evidently," said I, "Mr. Wilson's assistant counts for a good deal in this mystery of the Red-Headed League. I am sure that you inquired your way merely in order that you might see him."

"Not him."

"What then?"

"The knees of his trousers."

"And what did you see?"

"What I expected to see."

"Why did you beat the pavement?"

"My dear doctor, this is a time for observation, not for talk. We are spies in an enemy's country. We know something of Saxe-Coburg Square. Let us now explore the parts which lie behind it."

The road in which we found ourselves as we turned round the corner from the retired Saxe-Coburg Square presented as great a contrast to it as the front of a picture does to the back. It was one of the main arteries which convey the traffic of the City to the north and west. The roadway was blocked with the immense stream of commerce flowing in a double tide inward and outward, while the footpaths were black with the hurrying swarm of pedestrians. It was difficult to realize, as we looked at the line of fine shops and stately business premises, that they really abutted on the other side upon the faded and stagnant square which we had just quitted.

"Let me see," said Holmes, standing at the corner, and glancing along the line, "I should like just to remember the order of the houses here. It is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of London. There is Mortimer's, the tobacconist; the little newspaper shop; the Coburg branch of the City and Suburban Bank; the Vegetarian Restaurant; and McFarlane's carriage-building depot. That carries us right on to the other block. And now, doctor, we've done our work, so it's time we had some play. A sandwich and a cup of coffee, and then off to violin-land, where all is sweetness, and delicacy, and harmony, and there are no red-headed clients to vex us with their conundrums."

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My friend was an enthusiastic musician, being himself not only a very capable performer, but a composer of no ordinary merit. All the afternoon he sat in the stalls wrapped in the most perfect happiness, gently waving his long thin fingers in time to the music, while his gently smiling face and his languid, dreamy eyes were as unlike those of Holmes the sleuth-hound, Holmes the relentless, keen-witted, ready-handed criminal agent, as it was possible to conceive. In his singular character the dual nature alternately asserted itself, and his extreme exactness and astuteness represented, as I have often thought, the reaction against the poetic and contemplative mood which occasionally predominated in him. The swing of his nature took him from extreme languor to devouring energy; and, as I knew well, he was never so truly formidable as when, for days on end, he had been lounging in his armchair amid his improvisations and his black-letter editions. Then it was that the lust of the chase would suddenly come upon him, and that his brilliant reasoning power would rise to the level of intuition, until those who were unacquainted with his methods would look askance at him as on a man whose knowledge was not that of other mortals. When I saw him that afternoon so enwrapped in the music of St. James's Hall, I felt that an evil time might be coming upon those whom he had set himself to hunt down.

"You want to go home, no doubt, doctor," he remarked, as we emerged.

"Yes, it would be as well."

"And I have some business to do which will take some hours. This business at Coburg Square is serious."

"Why serious?"

"A considerable crime is in contemplation. I have every reason to believe that we shall be in time to stop it. But today being Saturday rather complicates matters. I shall want your help tonight."

"At what time?"

"Ten will be early enough."

"I shall be at Baker Street at ten."

"Very well. And, I say, doctor! there may be some little danger, so kindly put your army revolver in your pocket." He waved his hand, turned on his heel, and disappeared in an instant among the crowd.

I trust that I am not more dense than my neighbors, but I was always oppressed with a sense of my own stupidity in my dealings with Sherlock Holmes. Here I had heard what he had heard, I had seen what he had seen, and yet from his words it was evident that he saw clearly not only what had happened, but what was about to happen, while to me the whole business was still confused and grotesque. As I drove home to my house in Kensington I thought over it all, from the extraordinary story of the red-headed copier of the *Encyclopedia* down to the visit to Saxe-Coburg Square, and the ominous words with which he had parted from me. What was this nocturnal expedition, and why should I go armed? Where were we going, and

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what were we to do? I had the hint from Holmes that this smooth-faced pawnbroker's assistant was a formidable man — a man who might play a deep game. I tried to puzzle it out, but gave it up in despair, and set the matter aside until night should bring an explanation.

It was a quarter-past nine when I started from home and made my way across the Park, and so through Oxford Street to Baker Street. Two hansoms were standing at the door, and, as I entered the passage, I heard the sound of voices from above. On entering his room, I found Holmes in animated conversation with two men, one of whom I recognized as Peter Jones, the official police agent; while the other was a long, thin, sad-faced man, with a very shiny hat and oppressively respectable frock-coat.

"Ha! our party is complete," said Holmes, buttoning up his pea-jacket, and taking his heavy hunting crop from the rack. "Watson, I think you know Mr. Jones, of Scotland Yard? Let me introduce you to Mr. Merryweather, who is to be our companion in tonight's adventure."

"We're hunting in couples again, doctor, you see," said Jones, in his consequential way. "Our friend here is a wonderful man for starting a chase. All he wants is an old dog to help him do the running down."

"I hope a wild goose may not prove to be the end of our chase," observed Mr. Merryweather, gloomily.

"You may place considerable confidence in Mr. Holmes, sir," said the police agent, loftily. "He has his own little methods, which are, if he won't mind my saying so, just a little too theoretical and fantastic, but he has the makings of a detective in him. It is not too much to say that once or twice, as in that business of the Sholto murder and the Agra treasure, he has been more nearly correct than the official force."

"Oh, if you say so, Mr. Jones, it is all right!" said the stranger, with deference. "Still, I confess that I miss my rubber. It is the first Saturday night for seven-and-twenty years that I have not had my rubber."

"I think you will find," said Sherlock Holmes, "that you will play for a higher stake tonight than you have ever done yet, and that the play will be more exciting. For you, Mr. Merryweather, the stake will be some thirty thousand pounds; and for you, Jones, it will be the man upon whom you wish to lay your hands."

"John Clay, the murderer, thief, smasher, and forger. He's a young man, Mr. Merryweather, but he is at the head of his profession, and I would rather have my bracelets on him than on any criminal in London. He's a remarkable man, is young John Clay. His grandfather was a Royal Duke, and he himself has been to Eton and Oxford. His brain is as cunning as his fingers, and though we meet signs of him at every turn, we never know where to find the man himself. He'll crack a crib in Scotland one week, and be raising money to build an orphanage in Cornwall the next. I've been

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on his track for years, and have never set eyes on him yet."

"I hope that I may have the pleasure of introducing you tonight. I've had one or two little turns also with Mr. John Clay, and I agree with you that he is at the head of his profession. It is past ten, however; and quite time that we started. If you two will take the first hansom, Watson and I will follow in the second."

Sherlock Holmes was not very communicative during the long drive, and lay back in the cab humming the tunes which he had heard in the afternoon. We rattled through an endless labyrinth of gas-lit streets until we emerged into Farringdon Street.

"We are close there now," my friend remarked. "This fellow Merryweather is a bank director and personally interested in the matter. I thought it as well to have Jones with us also. He is not a bad fellow, though an absolute imbecile in his profession. He has one positive virtue. He is as brave as a bulldog, and as tenacious as a lobster if he gets his claws upon anyone. Here we are, and they are waiting for us."

We had reached the same crowded thoroughfare in which we had found ourselves in the morning. Our cabs were dismissed, and following the guidance of Mr. Merryweather, we passed down a narrow passage, and through a side door which he opened for us. Within there was a small corridor, which ended in a very massive iron gate. This also was opened, and led down a flight of winding stone steps, which terminated at another formidable gate. Mr. Merryweather stopped to light a lantern, and then conducted us down a dark, earth-smelling passage, and so, after opening a third door, into a huge vault or cellar, which was piled all round with crates and massive boxes.

"You are not very vulnerable from above," Holmes remarked, as he held up the lantern and gazed about him.

"Nor from below," said Mr. Merryweather, striking his stick upon the flags which lined the floor. "Why, dear me, it sounds quite hollow!" he remarked, looking up in surprise.

"I must really ask you to be a little more quiet," said Holmes, severely. "You have already imperiled the whole success of our expedition. Might I beg that you would have the goodness to sit down upon one of those boxes, and not to interfere?"

The solemn Mr. Merryweather perched himself upon a crate, with a very injured expression upon his face, while Holmes fell upon his knees upon the floor, and, with the lantern and a magnifying lens, began to examine minutely the cracks between the stones. A few seconds sufficed to satisfy him, for he sprang to his feet again, and put his glass in his pocket.

"We have at least an hour before us," he remarked, "for they can hardly take any steps until the good pawnbroker is safely in bed. Then they will not lose a minute, for the sooner they do their work the longer time they will have for their escape. We are at present, doctor — as no

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doubt you have divined — in the cellar of the City branch of one of the principal London banks. Mr. Merryweather is the chairman of directors, and he will explain to you that there are reasons why the more daring criminals of London should take a considerable interest in this cellar at present."

"It is our French gold," whispered the director. "We have had several warnings that an attempt might be made upon it."

"Your French gold?"

"Yes. We had occasion some months ago to strengthen our resources, and borrowed, for that purpose, thirty thousand napoleons from the Bank of France. It has become known that we have never had occasion to unpack the money, and that it is still lying in our cellar. The crate upon which I sit contains two thousand napoleons packed between layers of lead foil. Our reserve of bullion is much larger at present than is usually kept in a single branch office, and the directors have had misgivings upon the subject."

"Which were very well justified," observed Holmes. "And now it is time that we arranged our little plans. I expect that within an hour matters will come to a head. In the meantime, Mr. Merryweather, we must put the screen over that dark lantern."

"And sit in the dark?"

"I am afraid so. I had brought a pack of cards in my pocket, and I thought that, as we were a *partie carrée*, you might have your rubber after all. But I see that the enemy's preparations have gone so far that we cannot risk the presence of a light. And, first of all, we must choose our positions. These are daring men, and, though we shall take them at a disadvantage, they may do us some harm, unless we are careful. I shall stand behind this crate, and you conceal yourself behind those. Then, when I flash a light upon them, close in swiftly. If they fire, Watson, have no compunction about shooting them down."

I placed my revolver, cocked, upon the top of the wooden case behind which I crouched. Holmes shot the slide across the front of his lantern, and left us in pitch darkness — such an absolute darkness as I have never before experienced. The smell of hot metal remained to assure us that the light was still there, ready to flash out at a moment's notice. To me, with my nerves worked up to a pitch of expectancy, there was something depressing and subduing in the sudden gloom, and in the dank air of the vault.

"They have but one retreat," whispered Holmes. "That is back through the house into Saxe-Coburg Square. I hope that you have done what I asked you, Jones?"

"I have an inspector and two officers waiting at the front door."

"Then we have stopped all the holes. And now we must be silent and wait."

What a time it seemed! From comparing notes afterwards, it was but an hour and a quarter, yet it appeared to

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me that the night must have almost gone, and the dawn be breaking above us. My limbs were weary and stiff, for I feared to change my position, yet my nerves were worked up to the highest pitch of tension, and my hearing was so acute that I could not only hear the gentle breathing of my companions, but I could distinguish the deeper, heavier inbreath of the bulky Jones from the thin, sighing note of the bank director. From my position I could look over the case in the direction of the floor. Suddenly my eyes caught the glint of a light.

At first it was but a lurid spark upon the stone pavement. Then it lengthened out until it became a yellow line, and then, without any warning or sound, a gash seemed to open and a hand appeared, a white, almost womanly hand, which felt about in the center of the little area of light. For a minute or more the hand, with its writhing fingers, protruded out of the floor. Then it was withdrawn as suddenly as it appeared, and all was dark again save the single lurid spark, which marked a chink between the stones.

Its disappearance, however, was but momentary. With a rending, tearing sound, one of the broad white stones turned over upon its side, and left a square, gaping hole, through which streamed the light of a lantern. Over the edge there peeped a clean-cut, boyish face, which looked keenly about it, and then, with a hand on either side of the aperture, drew itself shoulder-high and waist-high, until one knee rested upon the edge. In another instant he stood at the side of the hole, and was hauling after him a companion, lithe and small like himself, with a pale face and a shock of very red hair.

"It's all clear," he whispered. "Have you the chisel and the bags? Great Scott! Jump, Archie, jump, and I'll swing for it!"

Sherlock Holmes had sprung out and seized the intruder by the collar. The other dived down the hole, and I heard the sound of rending cloth as Jones clutched at his skirts. The light flashed upon the barrel of a revolver, but Holmes's hunting crop came down on the man's wrist, and the pistol clinked upon the stone floor.

"It's no use, John Clay," said Holmes, blandly, "you have no chance at all."

"So I see," the other answered, with the utmost coolness. "I fancy that my pal is all right, though I see you have got his coat-tails."

"There are three men waiting for him at the door," said Holmes.

"Oh, indeed. You seem to have done the thing very completely. I must compliment you."

"And I you," Holmes answered. "Your red-headed idea was very new and effective."

"You'll see your pal again presently," said Jones. "He's quicker at climbing down holes than I am. Just hold out while I fix the derbies."

"I beg that you will not touch me with your filthy hands," remarked our prisoner, as the handcuffs clat-

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tered upon his wrists. "You may not be aware that I have royal blood in my veins. Have the goodness also, when you address me, always to say 'sir' and 'please.' "

"All right," said Jones, with a stare and a snigger. "Well, would you please, sir, march upstairs where we can get a cab to carry your highness to the police station."

"That is better," said John Clay, serenely. He made a sweeping bow to the three of us, and walked quietly off.

"Really, Mr. Holmes," said Mr. Merryweather, as we followed them from the cellar, "I do not know how the bank can thank you or repay you. There is no doubt that you have detected and defeated in the most complete manner one of the most determined attempts at bank robbery that have ever come within my experience."

"I have had one or two little scores of my own to settle with Mr. John Clay," said Holmes. "I have been at some small expense over this matter, which I shall expect the bank to refund, but beyond that I am amply repaid by having had an experience which is in many ways unique, and by hearing the very remarkable narrative of the Red-Headed League."

"You see, Watson," he explained, in the early hours of the morning, as we sat over a glass of whisky and soda in Baker Street, "it was perfectly obvious from the first that the only possible object of this rather fantastic business of the advertisement of the League, and the copying of the *Encyclopedia*, must be to get this not overbright pawnbroker out of the way for a number of hours every day. It was a curious way of managing it, but really it would be difficult to suggest a better. The method was no doubt suggested to Clay's ingenious mind by the color of his accomplice's hair. The four pounds a week was a lure which must draw him, and what was it to them, who were playing for thousands? They put in the advertisement, one rogue has the temporary office, the other rogue incites the man to apply for it, and together they manage to secure his absence every morning in the week. From the time that I heard of the assistant having come for half-wages, it was obvious to me that he had some strong motive for securing the situation."

"But how could you guess what the motive was?"

"Had there been women in the house, I should have suspected a mere vulgar intrigue. That, however, was out of the question. The man's business was a small one, and there was nothing in his house which could account for such elaborate preparations, and such an expenditure as they were at. It must then be something *out* of the house. What could it be? I thought of the assistant's fondness for photography, and his trick of vanishing into the cellar. The cellar! There was the end of this tangled clue. Then I made inquiries as to this mysterious assistant, and found that I had to deal with one of the coolest and most daring criminals in London. He was doing

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something in the cellar — something which took many hours a day for months on end. What could it be, once more? I could think of nothing save that he was running a tunnel to some other building.

"So far I had got when we went to visit the scene of action. I surprised you by beating upon the pavement with my stick. I was ascertaining whether the cellar stretched out in front or behind. It was not in front. Then I rang the bell, and, as I hoped, the assistant answered it. We have had some skirmishes, but we had never set eyes upon each other before. I hardly looked at his face. His knees were what I wished to see. You must yourself have remarked how worn, wrinkled, and stained they were. They spoke of those hours of burrowing. The only remaining point was what they were burrowing for. I walked round the corner, saw that the City and Suburban Bank abutted on our friend's premises, and felt that I had solved my problem. When you drove home after the concert I called upon Scotland Yard, and upon the chairman of the bank directors, with the result that you have seen."

"And how could you tell that they would make their attempt tonight?"

"Well, when they closed their League offices that was a sign that they cared no longer about Mr. Jabez Wilson's presence; in other words, that they had completed their tunnel. But it was essential that they should use it soon, as it might be discovered, or the bullion might be removed. Saturday would suit them better than any other day, as it would give them two days for their escape. For all these reasons I expected them tonight."

"You reasoned it out beautifully," I exclaimed, in unfeigned admiration. "It is so long a chain, and yet every link rings true."

"It saved me from ennui," he answered, yawning. "Alas! I already feel it closing in upon me. My life is spent in one long effort to escape from the commonplaces of existence. These little problems help me to do so."

"And you are a benefactor of the race," said I.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, perhaps, after all, it is of some little use," he remarked. "'*L'homme c'est rien — l'œuvre c'est tout*,' as Gustave Flaubert wrote to Georges Sand."

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NOT FOR A CHORUS GIRL

by C. S. MONTANYE

At the Boulevard, Herrington hailed a southbound taxi. "Lake Street," he told the driver. "No hurry."

He relaxed against the worn upholstery, a sense of well-being stealing through him.

The taxi stopped at the designated spot. Herrington paid the toll on its clock. He walked a little way north on the Avenue, and entered the jewelry store of Blackmere, Bailey and La Motte. There were three customers at the counters.

"Can I be of assistance?"

The man who spoke to Herrington was middle-aged. His frock coat, gray-striped trousers, and plain cravat gave him a dignity in keeping with the establishment.

"I would like," Herrington replied, "to see a pearl necklace."

The other's glance surveyed Herrington politely.

"If you could give me an idea of the price you wish to pay ——"

Herrington, after some thought, named a figure and presently found himself appraising three lustrous pearl necklaces.

"I rather imagine," he said reflectively, "one of these will do. I should like to bring the young lady for whom the necklace is intended here so she can make a choice."

"I'll be very happy to show them to her," the clerk said.

Herrington raised his glance.

"Will you let me have your card?" he asked. "You might, also, give me the numbers on the tags of these three strings."

"Gladly."

The clerk took an engraved card from his pocket. On its reverse side he copied off the identifying ciphers. Herrington took the card, and arose casually.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Latham. I'll stop in again shortly. Here's my card."

He gave Latham one of the engraved cards he had had made a few days previous. It was inscribed with the name of Reginald Satterlee. Latham took it and walked to the front door with him.

"Good morning, Mr. Satterlee. Thank you for calling."

Out on the Boulevard, Herrington walked south. At Madison Street he turned west and continued on until he reached a drug store. There were a number of telephone booths in the rear. Herrington found Blackmere, Bailey and La Motte's number, stepped into one of the booths, and dropped a nickel into the instrument.

A few seconds elapsed before a woman's voice answered.

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"May I speak with Mr. Blackmere?" Herrington requested.

"Who is this calling?"

"Oliver Barclay."

A minute ticked away before a man spoke: "Good morning, Mr. Barclay. This is Blackmere speaking. What can I do for you today?"

"Plenty. I'm in a rather awkward position. A few minutes ago I happened to remember today is Mrs. Barclay's birthday. I'm tied up with a directors' meeting and a luncheon. I wonder if you could help me out."

"In any way you suggest," Blackmere assured him.

Herrington slipped Latham's card from his pocket, and glanced at it.

"Here's the idea. A few weeks ago I was in your place. At the time I looked at some pearls — for my daughter. One string caught my fancy. I jotted down the tag number of it and have it here before me. If you could send it over to my house early this afternoon I would appreciate it."

Herrington supplied one of the numbers Latham had written on his card and waited.

"The matter will be taken care of, Mr. Barclay. This afternoon. Shall I include a gift card?"

Herrington thanked him and hung up. Toward three o'clock he made another telephone call. This time he dialed the number of Oliver Barclay's house on North Shore Drive. A servant in the financier's home answered.

"This is Blackmere, Bailey and La Motte's," Herrington stated. "Can you tell me if a package for Mrs. Barclay was left there this afternoon?"

"If you will hold the wire," the servant answered, "I will find out."

Herrington kept the receiver glued to his ear. At least five minutes elapsed before the man returned.

"Hello. What did you find out?"

"Yes, sir. It came a half hour ago."

Herrington drew a breath.

"I'm sorry to inconvenience you but it was left by mistake. I am sending one of our clerks over to get it. He is a Mr. Latham and I will appreciate your returning the package to him."

"Yes, sir."

When Herrington hung up he noted the time. It was ten minutes past three o'clock. With the final goal in sight he didn't wish to hurry matters. Accordingly, he shaped a course leisurely on foot.

Herrington told himself that success in such a venture came only after study and careful planning. He had made Oliver Barclay the subject of intensive research work. He had come to know that the financier's account with the jewelry shop was of long standing; he knew about Barclay's ranch in Southern California, the man's yacht, clubs, and private affairs. It had taken considerable time to gather the information but it was well worth the effort.

At Wacker Drive he signaled a taxi and gave the driver Barclay's address. "Wait," he directed, when the car came to a stop before the sedate four-story house. "I won't be long."

Herrington pressed the bell. A

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servant opened the inner vestibule door for him. Herrington handed the man the card Latham had given him, the penciled numbers on its reverse side erased.

"I'm from Blackmere, Bailey and La Motte's," he explained.

The servant glanced at the card.

"Mr. Latham, yes, sir. I have the package here for you."

He crossed the foyer to a small table. Taking an oblong, paper-wrapped box he crossed back.

"We're sorry to have caused you any trouble," Herrington murmured, his hand not entirely steady as he took the package.

"It's quite all right, Mr. Latham."

The servant held the door open for him. Herrington, with an effort, suppressed the desire to hurry down the steps and into the waiting taxi. Only his eyes betrayed his inner excitement. He could feel the heavy pound of his heart when he moved toward the vehicle at the curb.

"Superior Street," he directed the driver. "Step on it!"

Herrington pulled the door shut and sat down on the rear seat. As he did so the motionless figure of a man bulking in the corner stirred. Herrington had the impression of cold gray eyes boring into him, the glimmer of steel equally cold in the man's hand.

"I've been waiting for you," he said. "I'm Mason, from headquarters."

Herrington sat still and silent. After a time: "Where did I slip?"

The man beside him laughed.

"Next time you try a fast one like this," he said, "get your facts down right before you start."

"You mean —"

"I mean," the man beside him grunted, "only chorus dames have two birthdays the same month!"

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QUEEN'S QUORUM: *Part Seven*

by ELLERY QUEEN

IN 1918 Melville Davisson Post made his culminating contribution to the genre — the book-appearance of the "protector of the innocent and righter of wrongs," the "voice and arm of the Lord," stalwart, rugged Uncle Abner, Virginia squire of the Jeffersonian era.

In the same way that Chesterton's THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN, among all the books of detective short stories written by English authors, ranks second only to Doyle's THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, so

60. Melville Davisson Post's
UNCLE ABNER
New York: D. Appleton, 1918

is second only to Poe's TALES among all the books of detective short stories written by American authors. This statement is made dogmatically and without reservation: a cold-blooded and calculated critical opinion which we believe will be as true one hundred years from now as we wholeheartedly believe it to be true today. These four books, two American and two British, are the finest in their field — the *crème de la* crime. They are an out-of-this-world target for future detective-story writers to take shots at — but it will be like throwing pebbles at the Pyramids.

It is not generally known that ten years later, in 1927 and 1928, Melville Davisson Post wrote a second series of Uncle Abner stories — a novelette and three shorts. The titles are *The Mystery at Hillhouse* (novelette), *The Devil's Track*, *The Dark Night*, and — perhaps the most perfect of all Uncle Abner titles — *The God of the Hills*. Utterly incredible as it may seem, none of the tales in this second series has ever appeared in book form — a prodigious publishing pity.

The year 1918 also witnessed the arrival between covers of the first correspondence-school detective — a small-town paperhanger who commits a slight case of murder on the King's English every time he talks. Philo Gubb performs his rustic ratiocination in a lemon-yellow book, its front-cover illustration showing a tall, gaunt Holmesian figure wearing a cap and dressing

Original version of "Queen's Quorum" from Twentieth Century Detective Stories, edited by Ellery Queen. Copyright, 1948, by The World Publishing Company

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gown, a long pipe sticking out of his Sherlockian face, an enormous microscope on the table behind him, a beautiful damsel sitting in the client's chair, a bookcase jammed with ponderous tomes in the background, and a framed diploma from the Rising Sun Detective Agency's Correspondence School on the wall — all nostalgically in

61. Ellis Parker Butler's
PHILO GUBB
Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918

The tradition of the Mail Order Manhunter who is also the Defective Detective De Luxe was nobly revived in Percival Wilde's P. MORAN, OPERATIVE (New York: Random House, 1947). Comic criminologists like Philo Gubb and P. Moran break through the clouds only once in a generation: they are the rare birds of detection — the humorous Holmeses, the ludicrous Lecoqs.

Many of the tales written by John Russell, famous for his colorful stories of the South Seas, deal with crime and the police. A superlative collection was first published as

62. John Russell's
THE RED MARK
New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1919

and reissued in 1921 by the same publisher as WHERE THE PAVEMENT ENDS. Conan Doyle called this volume "the best book of short tales by any debutant since Kipling's PLAIN TALES," and Harry Hansen described the book as containing "marvelous tales, full of life in the raw, full of primitive emotions and melodrama." A more conventional book of crime stories by John Russell, well worth your postprandial and presomnial attention, is COPS 'N ROBBERS (New York: W. W. Norton, 1930).

Which brings us to 1920, the final year of the Second Golden Era — a year which added six cornerstones to our foundations for the future and by sheer productivity wound up the decade in a blaze of glory. William LeQueux, whose long list of short-story collections began in 1895, gave us his best and purest detection in

63. William LeQueux's
MYSTERIES OF A GREAT CITY
London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1920

"being reminiscences of Monsieur Raoul Becq, ex-sous-chef of the Sureté-Générale of Paris." Sax Rohmer, creator of Dr. Fu Manchu, sired in print the strange old antique dealer who wore an archaic brown bowler, gold-

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rimmed pince-nez, black silk muffler, and long-toed continental boots, who sprayed verbena on his high, bald brow in the presence of the dead, and who carried with him a red silk cushion odically sterilized — the charlatan-criminologist in

64. Sax Rohmer's
THE DREAM-DETECTIVE
London: Jarrolds, 1920

"being some account of the methods of Moris Klaw." J. Storer Clouston took his place on the Honor Roll, represented by the monocled young inquiry agent in

65. J. Storer Clouston's
CARRINGTON'S CASES
Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1920

Vincent Starrett joined the Blue Ribbon Panel of posterity by writing "a hitherto unchronicled adventure of Mr. Sherlock Holmes" which is universally conceded to be the best pastiche of Holmes extant. The first edition of

66. Vincent Starrett's
THE UNIQUE HAMLET
Chicago: Privately printed for the
friends of Walter M. Hill, 1920

is also one of the rarest pieces of Sherlockiana — it is virtually nonextant. Arthur Train became a member of the Grand Jury with the publication of the first of the famous Tutt books

67. Arthur Train's
TUTT AND MR. TUTT*
New York: Charles Scribner, 1920

* How to identify a true first edition of TUTT AND MR. TUTT: merely check the contents page. In the first edition, first issue, the contents page contains no less than four errors. In the first edition, second issue, the errors have been corrected by inserting a new contents page, pasted on the stub of the original leaf. The story titles were corrected as follows: from *Mock, Etc.* to *Mock Hen and Mock Turtle; Samuel and the Lawyer* to *Samuel and Delilah; While* Versus *Guile* to *Wile* Versus *Guile;* and *Heppowhite Tramp* to *The Hepplewhite Tramp.* The revisions were made with extraordinary dispatch: although both issues of the book clearly bear the legend *Published, March, 1920* on the verso of the title-page, the book was not actually published until April 9, 1920; the Queen collection contains a copy with the revised contents page in which the flyleaf is inscribed by Arthur Train to Hon. Herbert Hoover and dated, in Mr. Train's handwriting, April 16, 1920 — only one week after incorrect copies were officially on sale!

Mention should also be made, for its historical importance, of the forerunners of Tutt and Mr. Tutt. Thirty-one years before — only two years after the birth in print of Sherlock Holmes — another pair of law partners unraveled legal mysteries in Albion W. Tourgée's WITH GAUGE & SWALLOW, ATTORNEYS (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1889). The anticipation is remarkable.

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It is interesting to note that in a list of books prepared by a committee of the Faculty of Harvard Law School for prospective law students — "books which will help them decide about the desirability of entering the legal profession or which will be of value in preparation for the study of law" — the tales of Tutt are included as "an entertaining collection of short stories showing the great variety of questions which may confront a practising lawyer and the chances for ingenuity." So, Mr. Ephraim Tutt, tall and ungainly, with bony fingers and lank gray locks, with the inevitable stogy and the stove-pipe hat — in a phrase, the Lincolnesque legal beagle — has established his picturesque dignity even in the hallowed halls of Harvard — an academic acceptance seldom bestowed on fictional ferrets.

And finally, the year 1920 gave us the moanin', groanin', my-only-aunt Reggie Fortune: the man-size cherub with the perennial schoolboy complexion; the benevolent roly-poly who can be as hard as the hardest-boiled yegg; the stylistic epicure who has a heart twice as big as life, especially for the persecuted, and more especially when they are children; the mannered marionette fancier who blends sweetness and sympathy with slick sleuthing and whose method derives from a "simple faith in facts" plus "no imagination — I believe in evidence." The key Fortune book is

68. H. C. Bailey's
CALL MR. FORTUNE
London: Methuen, 1920

but the best of the Fortune books is MR. FORTUNE OBJECTS (London: Victor Gollancz, 1935) which contains two of Mr. Bailey's finest stories, *The Long Dinner* and *The Yellow Slugs.*

The second Golden Era reached a highwater mark in short-story manhunting, swelling the definitive list of cornerstones by no less than twenty-three important volumes. Great new names were inscribed in the roster of ratiocination — Father Brown, Craig Kennedy, Max Carrados, Hanaud, Uncle Abner, Mr. Tutt, Reggie Fortune. And great new names were still to come.

VII. The First Moderns

Like Post's Randolph Mason, who changed from an unscrupulous lawyer using his knowledge of legal loopholes to defeat justice to a lawyer-detective using that same knowledge to aid justice, Leblanc's Arsène Lupin also passed through a metamorphosis of criminous intent. Beginning in 1907 Lupin was a gay, dashing gentleman-burglar, and his vast audience loved the nonchalant way in which he taunted and thwarted the police. But somewhere

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along the line of his popularity Lupin shifted his tactics: in a transitional period he started to help his former adversaries, and in the end he became a full-fledged detective, openly on the side of law and order. What caused this transformation? Probably the public reaction to Leblanc's masterpiece, a novel titled 813 which appeared in 1911. Up to that time Lupin was content merely to steal, although on a grand scale; but in the denouement of 813 Lupin actually committed murder. French readers had joyfully accepted Lupin's brilliant coups of cracksmanship and had exalted him to the status of Public Hero Number 1 — but murder was a course of another color. Inherent morality may be sympathetic to roguery, but it is antipathetic to homicide. To retrieve his glamorous reputation Lupin reformed. He achieved his greatest detectival triumphs in

69. Maurice Leblanc's
LES HUITS COUPS DE L'HORLOGE
(THE EIGHT STROKES OF THE CLOCK)
Paris: P. Lafitte, 1922
London: Cassell, 1922
New York: Macaulay, 1922

In the same year Aldous Huxley wrote what Dorothy L. Sayers has called "the interpretation of real life" in detective fiction. His famous story, *The Gioconda Smile* — in MORTAL COILS (London: Chatto & Windus, 1922) — is supposedly based on the Dr. Armstrong *cause célèbre*, sometimes referred to as the Madame X case, although the author himself recalls only the Greenwood poisoning affair as his original source. Recently Aldous Huxley adapted his own story for the screen; the motion picture was called *A Woman's Vengeance*.

In 1923 one of America's most popular magazine writers created a detective of gargantuan figure with a huge chin and short fat legs. His chief recreation, when he wasn't just resting with his shoes off, was the movies where, being a supreme sentimentalist, he wept and suffered with the emoting actors on the screen. Fish-eyed, always smoking atrocious black cigars and wearing a golden tooth-pick, this regular-guy gumshoe befriended all criminals who had returned to the strait-and-narrow — the friend and yet the "terror of crooks from coast to coast." He is none other than

70. Octavus Roy Cohen's
JIM HANVEY, DETECTIVE
New York: Dodd, Mead, 1923

One of the most famous of all detectives made his short-story debut in 1924 — the conceited, syrupy popinjay with the egg-shaped head and the

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handle-bar mustaches, the elderly Belgian whose "little gray cells" are equally capable of intuitional flashes and deductive bull's-eyes in

71. Agatha Christie's
POIROT INVESTIGATES
London: John Lane, 1924

Hercule Poirot is Agatha Christie's *chef-d'oeuvre*, but her other short-story sleuths are not far behind. They include the delightful domestic duo, Tommy and Tuppence Beresford; the mystical Mr. Quin and his colleague, the sedentary Mr. Satterthwaite; the spinster-snooper, Miss Marple; and the typically British private-eye, Parker Pyne. The first Poirot book, while meriting cornerstone position, is not representative of Miss Christie's finest work in the short form. Her best short stories are *Philomel Cottage* and *Accident*, both to be found in a volume titled THE LISTERDALE MYSTERY (London: Collins, 1934) which by some incredible oversight on the part of American publishers has never been issued in the United States; neither of these classic tales, however, is a Poirot story. The most imaginative Poirot series — indicative of Miss Christie's ever-increasing fertility — is the latest in which Hercule emulates his legendary namesake. Each tale is inspired by an ancient Herculean labor but all are completely modernized and detectivized. For an exciting refresher-course in mythology, read the brilliantly conceived THE LABORS OF HERCULES (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1947).

At approximately the same time Edgar Wallace's most expert detective was beginning to say apologetically: "This is my curious perversion — I have a criminal mind." Mr. J. G. Reeder is a shy, wistful man, polite and formal in his speech, who wears old-fashioned side-whiskers and an Ascot tie, and who carries a reasonable facsimile of the homely, humble umbrella so emblematical of Father Brown. Mr. Reeder displays his acumen with quiet persuasion in

72. Edgar Wallace's
THE MIND OF MR. J. G. REEDER
London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1925

published in the United States as THE MURDER BOOK OF J. G. REEDER (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran, 1929).

If you agree that intolerance is the most heinous, the most despicable, of crimes, then we cannot overlook that remarkable story

73. Louis Golding's
LUIGI OF CATANZARO
London: E. Archer, 1926

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This first appearance in book form was privately printed, in an edition limited to 100 copies, all signed by the author. The second book appearance is an even greater rarity: the tale of Luigi was intended for inclusion in THE DOOMINGTON WANDERER (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934) but was suppressed from this volume before publication; however, at least one "Proof Copy" exists containing *Luigi of Catanzaro*.

An equally remarkable story by Mr. Golding — dealing with that form of intolerance called murder — also appeared first in a limited edition, this time of 60 copies for public sale, all signed by the author.

73a. Louis Golding's
PALE BLUE NIGHTGOWN
London: Corvinus Press, 1936

although published ten years after LUIGI OF CATANZARO, is here listed as a companion-piece because both stories are available in a later trade edition — PALE BLUE NIGHTGOWN (London: Hutchinson, 1944).

The "Harley Street giant" comes next in the cavalcade of crime-busters. The snuff-pinching, monocled specialist in mental diseases, Dr. Eustace Hailey, who prefers Bach to Beethoven and Holbein to Rubens, boasts only one volume of short stories

74. Anthony Wynne's
SINNERS GO SECRETLY
London: Hutchinson, 1927

whose most distinguished tale, *The Cyprian Bees*, has earned for Dr. Hailey an eternal seat among the mighty — all because the learned amateur investigator knew the criminal possibilities of anaphylactic shock.

Back in America, a decade before, Susan Glaspell had written a one-act play called *Trifles*, suggested by a murder account she had read in an Iowa newspaper. After the play had become famous, Miss Glaspell recast the material into a short story and titled it *A Jury of Her Peers*. Like the play, the short story became a celebrated piece of literature. It was first printed in "Every Week," issue of May 5, 1917, and later reprinted by Edward J. O'Brien in his THE BEST SHORT STORIES OF 1917. The story, however, has never been included in any of Susan Glaspell's own books published in America; but what is not generally known — and this is an important bibliographic revelation — is that the story has had a separate book publication in England. The first edition, a slim and fragile booklet, was limited to only 250 copies, all signed by the author. This beautifully-wrought tale of murder on a lonesome farm is pure New-England-Gothic — and pure artistry.

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75. Susan Glaspell's
A JURY OF HER PEERS
London: Ernest Benn, 1927

The year 1928 is memorable for three front-rank books. The erudite and ineffable Lord Peter Wimsey, easily the most renowned nobleman in larcenous letters, animated a notable volume of short stories in

76. Dorothy L. Sayers's
LORD PETER VIEWS THE BODY
London: Victor Gollancz, 1928

Miss Sayers has done more to add literary tone to crime fiction than most of her contemporaries, and it is to her infinite credit that she attempted to wed the detective story to the legitimate novel of manners with the utmost deliberation — almost, it might be said, with malice aforethought. While some critics share the belief that she "has now almost ceased to be a first-rate detective writer and has become an exceedingly snobbish popular novelist," one should not forget Howard Haycraft's subtle compliment to her larger aims — "her very errors do her honor."

(*to be continued in the May issue*)

THE NECKLACE OF PEARLS

by DOROTHY L. SAYERS

Sir Septimus Shale was accustomed to assert his authority once in the year and once only. He allowed his young and fashionable wife to fill his house with diagrammatic furniture made of steel; to collect advanced artists and anti-grammatical poets; to believe in cocktails and relativity and to dress as extravagantly as she pleased; but he did insist on an old-fashioned Christmas. He was a simple-hearted man, who really liked plum pudding and cracker mottoes, and he could not get it out of his head that other people, "at bottom," enjoyed these things also. At Christmas, therefore, he firmly retired to his country house in Essex, called in the servants to hang holly and mistletoe upon the cubist electric fittings; loaded the steel sideboard with delicacies from Fortnum & Mason; hung up stockings at the heads of the polished walnut bedsteads; and even, on this occasion only, had the electric radiators removed from the modernist grates and

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installed wood fires and a Yule log. He then gathered his family and friends about him, filled them with as much Dickensian good fare as he could persuade them to swallow, and, after their Christmas dinner, set them down to play "Charades" and "Clumps" and "Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral" in the drawing-room, concluding these diversions by "Hide and Seek" in the dark all over the house. Because Sir Septimus was a very rich man, his guests fell in with this invariable program, and if they were bored, they did not tell him so.

Another charming and traditional custom which he followed was that of presenting to his daughter Margharita a pearl on each successive birthday — this anniversary happening to coincide with Christmas Eve. The pearls now numbered twenty, and the collection was beginning to enjoy a certain celebrity, and had been photographed in the Society papers. Though not sensationally large — each one being about the size of a marrowfat pea — the pearls were of very great value. They were of exquisite color and perfect shape and matched to a hair's-weight. On this particular Christmas Eve the presentation of the twenty-first pearl had been the occasion of a very special ceremony. There was a dance and there were speeches. On the Christmas night following, the more restricted family party took place, with the turkey and the Victorian games. There were eleven guests, in addition to Sir Septimus and Lady Shale and their daughter, nearly all related or connected to them in some way: John Shale, a brother, with his wife and their son and daughter, Henry and Betty; Betty's fiancé, Oswald Truegood, a young man with parliamentary ambitions; George Comphrey, a cousin of Lady Shale's, aged about thirty and known as a man-about-town; Lavinia Prescott, asked on George's account; Joyce Trivett, asked on Henry Shale's account; Richard and Beryl Dennison, distant relations of Lady Shale, who lived a gay and expensive life in town on nobody precisely knew what resources; and Lord Peter Wimsey, asked, in a touching spirit of unreasonable hope, on Margharita's account. There were also, of course, William Norgate, secretary to Sir Septimus, and Miss Tomkins, secretary to Lady Shale.

Dinner was over — a seemingly endless succession of soup, fish, turkey, roast beef, plum pudding, mince pies, crystallized fruit, nuts, and five kinds of wine, presided over by Sir Septimus, all smiles, by Lady Shale, all mocking deprecation, and by Margharita, pretty and bored, with the necklace of twenty-one pearls gleaming softly on her slender throat. Gorged and dyspeptic and longing only for the horizontal position, the company had been shepherded into the drawing-room and set to play "Musical Chairs" (Miss Tomkins at the piano), "Hunt the Slipper" (slipper provided by Miss Tomkins), and "Dumb Crambo" (costumes by Miss Tomkins and Mr. William Norgate).

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The back drawing-room (for Sir Septimus clung to these old-fashioned names) provided an admirable dressing-room, being screened by folding doors from the large drawing-room in which the audience sat on aluminum chairs, scrabbling uneasy toes on a floor of black glass under the tremendous illumination of electricity reflected from a brass ceiling.

It was William Norgate who, after taking the temperature of the meeting, suggested to Lady Shale that they should play something less athletic. Lady Shale agreed and, as usual, suggested bridge. Sir Septimus, as usual, blew the suggestion aside.

"Bridge? Nonsense! Nonsense! Play bridge every day of your lives. This is Christmas time. Something we can all play together. How about 'Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral'?"

This intellectual pastime was a favorite with Sir Septimus; he was rather good at putting pregnant questions. After a brief discussion it became evident that this game was an inevitable part of the program. The party settled down to it, Sir Septimus undertaking to "go out" first and set the thing going.

Presently they had guessed among other things Miss Tomkins's mother's photograph, a gramaphone record of "I Want To Be Happy" (much scientific research into the exact composition of records, settled by William Norgate out of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*), the smallest stickleback in the stream at the bottom of the garden, the new planet Pluto, the scarf worn by Mrs. Dennison (very confusing, because it was not silk, which would be animal, or artificial silk, which would be vegetable, but made of spun glass — mineral, a very clever choice of subject), and had failed to guess the Prime Minister's wireless speech — which was voted not fair, since nobody could decide whether it was animal by nature or a kind of gas. It was decided that they should do one more word and then go on to "Hide and Seek." Oswald Truegood had retired into the back room and shut the door behind him while the party discussed the next subject of examination, when suddenly Sir Septimus broke in on the argument by calling to his daughter:

"Hullo, Margy! What have you done with your necklace?"

"I took it off, Dad, because I thought it might get broken in 'Dumb Crambo.' It's over here on this table. No, it isn't. Did you take it, Mother?"

"No, I didn't. If I'd seen it, I should have. You are a careless child."

"I believe you've got it yourself, Dad. You're teasing."

Sir Septimus denied the accusation with some energy. Everybody got up and began to hunt about. There were not many places in that bare and polished room where a necklace could be hidden. After ten minutes' fruitless investigation Richard Dennison, who had been seated next to the table where the pearls had been placed, began to look rather uncomfortable.

At this moment Oswald Truegood put his head through the folding-doors

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and asked whether they hadn't settled on something by now.

This directed the attention of the searchers to the inner room. Margharita must have been mistaken. She had taken it in there, and it had got mixed up with the dressing-up clothes somehow. The room was ransacked. Everything was lifted up and shaken. The thing began to look serious. After half an hour of desperate energy it became apparent that the pearls were nowhere to be found.

"They must be somewhere in these two rooms, you know," said Wimsey. "The back drawing-room has no door and nobody could have gone out of the front drawing-room without being seen. Unless the windows ——"

No. The windows were all guarded on the outside by heavy shutters which it needed two footmen to take down and replace. The pearls had not gone out that way. In fact, the mere suggestion that they had left the drawing-room at all was disagreeable. Because — because ——

It was William Norgate, efficient as ever, who boldly faced the issue.

"I think, Sir Septimus, it would be a relief to the minds of everybody present if we could all be searched."

Sir Septimus was horrified, but the guests, having found a leader, backed up Norgate. The door was locked, and the search was conducted — the ladies in the inner room and the men in the outer.

Nothing resulted from it except some very interesting information about the belongings habitually carried about by the average man and woman. It was natural that Lord Peter Wimsey should possess a pair of forceps, a pocket lens, and a small folding foot-rule — was he not a Sherlock Holmes in high life? But that Oswald Truegood should have two liver-pills in a screw of paper and Henry Shale a pocket edition of *The Odes of Horace* was unexpected. Why did John Shale distend the pockets of his dress-suit with a stump of red sealing-wax, an ugly little mascot, and a five-shilling piece? George Comphrey had a pair of folding scissors, and three wrapped lumps of sugar, of the sort served in restaurants and dining-cars — evidence of a not uncommon form of kleptomania; but that the tidy and exact Norgate should burden himself with a reel of white cotton, three separate lengths of string, and twelve safety-pins on a card seemed really remarkable till one remembered that he had superintended all the Christmas decorations. Richard Dennison, amid some confusion and laughter, was found to cherish a lady's garter, a powder-compact and half a potato; the last-named, he said, was a prophylactic against rheumatism (to which he was subject), while the other objects belonged to his wife. On the ladies' side, the more striking exhibits were a little book on palmistry, three invisible hair-pins, and a baby's photograph (Miss Tomkins); a Chinese trick cigarette-case with a secret compartment (Beryl Dennison); a *very* private letter and an outfit for mending stocking-runs (Lavinia Prescott);

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and a pair of eyebrow tweezers and a small packet of white powder, said to be for headaches (Betty Shale). An agitating moment followed the production from Joyce Trivett's handbag of a small string of pearls — but it was promptly remembered that these had come out of one of the crackers at dinner-time, and they were, in fact, synthetic. In short, the search was unproductive of anything beyond a general shamefacedness and the discomfort always produced by undressing and re-dressing in a hurry at the wrong time of the day.

It was then that somebody, very grudgingly and haltingly, mentioned the horrid word *Police*. Sir Septimus, naturally, was appalled by the idea. It was disgusting. He would not allow it. The pearls must be somewhere. They must search the rooms again. Could not Lord Peter Wimsey, with his experience of — er — mysterious happenings, do something to assist them?

"Eh?" said his lordship. "Oh, by Jove, yes — by all means, certainly. That is to say, provided nobody supposes — eh, what? I mean to say, you don't know that I'm not a suspicious character, do you, what?"

Lady Shale interposed with authority.

"We don't think *anybody* ought to be suspected," she said, "but, if we did, we'd know it couldn't be you. You know *far* too much about crimes to want to commit one."

"All right," said Wimsey. "But after the way the place has been gone over ——" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Yes, I'm afraid you won't be able to find any footprints," said Margharita. "But we may have overlooked something."

Wimsey nodded.

"I'll try. Do you all mind sitting down on your chairs in the outer room and staying there. All except one of you — I'd better have a witness to anything I do or find. Sir Septimus — you'd be the best person, I think."

He shepherded them to their places and began a slow circuit of the two rooms, exploring every surface, gazing up to the polished brazen ceiling and crawling on hands and knees in the approved fashion across the black and shining desert of the floors. Sir Septimus followed, staring when Wimsey stared, bending with his hands upon his knees when Wimsey crawled, and puffing at intervals with astonishment and chagrin.

They reached the inner drawing-room, and here the dressing-up clothes were again minutely examined, but without result. Finally, Wimsey lay down flat on his stomach to squint under a steel cabinet which was one of the very few pieces of furniture which possessed short legs. Something about it seemed to catch his attention. He rolled up his sleeve and plunged his arm into the cavity, kicked convulsively in the effort to reach farther than was humanly possible, pulled out from his pocket and extended his folding foot-rule, fished with it under the cabinet, and eventually succeeded in extracting what he sought.

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It was a very minute object — in fact, a pin. Not an ordinary pin, but one resembling those used by entomologists to impale extremely small moths on the setting-board. It was about three-quarters of an inch in length, as fine as a very fine needle, with a sharp point and a small head.

"Bless my soul!" said Sir Septimus. "What's that?"

"Does anybody here happen to collect moths or beetles or anything?" asked Wimsey.

"I'm pretty sure they don't," replied Sir Septimus. "I'll ask them."

"Don't do that." Wimsey bent his head and stared at the floor, from which his own face stared back at him.

"I see," said Wimsey presently. "That's how it was done. All right, Sir Septimus. I know where the pearls are, but I don't know who took them. Perhaps it would be as well — for everybody's satisfaction — just to find out. In the meantime they are perfectly safe. Don't tell anyone that we've found this pin or that we've discovered anything. Send all these people to bed. Lock the drawing-room door and keep the key, and we'll get our man — or woman — by breakfast-time."

Lord Peter Wimsey kept careful watch that night upon the drawing-room door. Nobody, however, came near it. Either the thief suspected a trap or he felt confident that any time would do to recover the pearls. Wimsey, however, did not feel that he was wasting his time. He was making a list of people who had been left alone in the back drawing-room during the playing of "Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral." The list ran as follows:

Sir Septimus Shale
Lavinia Prescott
William Norgate
Joyce Trivett and Henry Shale (together, because they had claimed to be incapable of guessing anything unaided)
Mrs. Dennison
Betty Shale
George Comphrey
Richard Dennison
Miss Tomkins
Oswald Truegood

He also made out a list of the persons to whom pearls might be useful or desirable. Unfortunately, this list agreed in almost all respects with the first (always excepting Sir Septimus) and so was not very helpful. The two secretaries had both come well recommended, but that was exactly what they would have done had they come with ulterior designs; the Dennisons were notorious livers from hand to mouth; Betty Shale carried mysterious white powders in her handbag, and was known to be in with a rather rapid set in town; Henry was a harmless dilettante, but Joyce Trivett could twist him round her little finger and was what Jane Austen liked to call "expensive and dissipated"; Comphrey speculated; Oswald Truegood was rather frequently present at Epsom and Newmarket — the search for motives was only too fatally easy.

When the second housemaid and

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the under-footman appeared in the passage with household implements, Wimsey abandoned his vigil, but he was down early to breakfast.

The party assembled gradually, but, as though by common consent, nothing was said about pearls until after breakfast, when Oswald Truegood took the bull by the horns.

"Well, now!" said he. "How's the detective getting along? Got your man, Wimsey?"

"Not yet," said Wimsey easily.

Sir Septimus, looking at Wimsey as though for his cue, cleared his throat and dashed into speech.

"All very tiresome," he said, "all very unpleasant. Hr'rm. Nothing for it but the police, I'm afraid. Just at Christmas, too. Hr'rm. Spoiled the party. Can't stand seeing all this stuff about the place." He waved his hand towards the festoons of evergreens and colored paper that adorned the walls. "Take it all down, eh, what? No heart in it. Hr'rm. Burn the lot."

"Oh, leave it, Uncle," said Henry Shale. "You're bothering too much about the pearls."

"Shall I ring for James?" suggested William Norgate.

"No," interrupted Comphrey, "let's do it ourselves. It'll give us something to do and take our minds off our troubles."

"That's right," said Sir Septimus. "Start right away."

He savagely hauled a great branch of holly down from the mantelpiece and flung it, crackling, into the fire.

"That's the stuff," said Richard Dennison. "Make a good old blaze!" He leaped up from the table and snatched the mistletoe from the chandelier. "Here goes! One more kiss for somebody before it's too late."

"Isn't it unlucky to take it down before the New Year?" suggested Miss Tomkins.

"Unlucky be hanged! We'll have it all down. Off the stairs and out of the drawing-room too. Somebody go and collect it."

"Isn't the drawing-room locked?" asked Oswald.

"No. Lord Peter says the pearls aren't there, wherever else they are, so it's unlocked. That's right, isn't it, Wimsey?"

"Quite right. The pearls were taken out of these rooms. I can't yet tell you how, but I'm positive of it."

"Oh, well," said Comphrey, "in that case, have at it! Come along, Lavinia — you and Dennison do the drawing-room and I'll do the back room. We'll have a race."

Oswald and Margharita were already pulling the holly and ivy from the staircase, amid peals of laughter. The party dispersed. Wimsey went quietly upstairs and into the drawing-room, where the work of demolition was taking place at a great rate, George having bet the other two ten shillings to a tanner that they would not finish their part of the job before he finished his.

"You mustn't help," said Lavinia, laughing to Wimsey. "It wouldn't be fair."

Wimsey said nothing, but waited

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till the room was clear. Then he followed them down again to the hall, where the fire was sending up a great roaring and spluttering, suggestive of Guy Fawkes night. He whispered to Sir Septimus, who went forward and touched George Comphrey on the shoulder.

"Lord Peter wants to say something to you, my boy," he said.

Comphrey started, and went with him a little reluctantly, as it seemed. He was not looking very well.

"Mr. Comphrey," said Wimsey, "I fancy these are some of your property." He held out the palm of his hand, in which rested twenty-two fine, small-headed pins.

"Ingenious," said Wimsey, "but something less ingenious would have served his turn better. It was very unlucky, Sir Septimus, that you should have mentioned the pearls when you did. Of course, he hoped that the loss wouldn't be discovered till we'd chucked guessing games and taken to 'Hide and Seek.' Then the pearls might have been anywhere in the house, we shouldn't have locked the drawing-room door, and he could have recovered them at his leisure. He had had this possibility in his mind when he came here, obviously, and that was why he brought the pins, and Miss Shale's taking off the necklace to play 'Dumb Crambo' gave him his opportunity.

"He had spent Christmas here before, and knew perfectly well that 'Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral' would form part of the entertainment. He had only to gather up the necklace from the table when it came to his turn to retire, and he knew he could count on at least five minutes by himself while we were all arguing about the choice of a word. He had only to snip the pearls from the string with his pocket-scissors, burn the string in the grate, and fasten the pearls to the mistletoe with the fine pins. The mistletoe was hung on the chandelier, pretty high — it's a lofty room — but he could easily reach it by standing on the glass table, which wouldn't show footmarks, and it was almost certain that nobody would think of examining the mistletoe for extra berries. I shouldn't have thought of it myself if I hadn't found that pin which he had dropped. That gave me the idea that the pearls had been separated, and the rest was easy. I took the pearls off the mistletoe last night — the clasp was there, too, pinned among the holly-leaves. Here they are. Comphrey must have got a nasty shock this morning. I knew he was our man when he suggested that the guests should tackle the decorations themselves and that he should do the back drawing-room — but I wish I had seen his face when he came to the mistletoe and found the pearls gone."

"But you never even looked at the mistletoe when you found the pin."

"I saw it reflected in the black glass floor, and it struck me then how much the mistletoe berries looked like pearls."

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If you notice as time goes on that EQMM publishes more and more of the work of contemporary French detective-story writers, give all credit to Maurice Renault, the perceptive and imaginative editor of the French edition of "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine." Monsieur Renault has already brought to you the interesting stories of Pierre Boileau; now, through M. Renault's good offices, we are able to present a "psycho-thriller" by Thomas Narcejac; and there will be other tales of Gallic gumshoes and French felons in the near future . . .

Thomas Narcejac was born at Rochefort-sur-Mer in 1908, and has lived in Nantes since 1945. He is a teacher of "lettres et philosophie." Before the war he was a journalist, and contributor to many magazines. He wrote his first detective story, L'ASSASSIN DE MINUIT (THE MIDNIGHT MURDERER) *in 1945. In the following year he published* ESTHÉTIQUE DU ROMAN POLICIER *— one of the very few full-length critical studies of the technique of the detective story.*

In 1946 and 1947 M. Narcejac brought out two collections of detective pastiches. The first, titled CONFIDENCES DANS MA NUIT (SECRETS IN MY NIGHT), *contains seven short stories, "in the manner" respectively of Simenon, Maurice Leblanc, Pierre Véry, Leslie Charteris, Conan Doyle, G. K. Chesterton, and Agatha Christie. The second volume, titled* NOUVELLES CONFIDENCES DANS MA NUIT (NEW SECRETS IN MY NIGHT), *also contains seven shorts, this time "in the taste" respectively of Earl der Biggers [sic], Peter Cheyney, S. S. Van Dine, Dorothy Sayers, Ellery Queen, Hadley Chase, and Edgar Wallace.*

Thomas Narcejac is, by habit and talent, a consistent Prize Winner. In 1947 he won the "Editions du Portulan" contest with LA POLICE EST DANS L'ESCALIER (THE POLICE ARE ON THE STAIRS), *and in 1948 he was awarded the Grand Prize of the Adventure Novel with* LA MORT EST DU VOYAGE (DEATH TAKES A TRIP). *Also in 1948, M. Narcejac's "The Vampire" won a special award in EQMM's Fourth Annual Contest.*

THE VAMPIRE

by THOMAS NARCEJAC

(translated by Anthony Boucher)

"Coffee, Gaby." He was the last customer. Madame Mouffiat was at the cash register, reading a paper; Gaby was noisily clearing the tables, wiping them off, piling the chairs on them. She poured the cof-

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fee, then paused beside the cashier.

"He never takes it," she said. "I don't know what's got into him tonight."

Désiré Lambourdin went on contemplating the front page of *Paris-Informations*. The headlines were large and black: *VAMPIRE STRANGLES CHAMBERMAID. POLICE STILL HELPLESS.*

Four victims already, and all had been raped. Lambourdin sighed and tossed away his toothpick. Gaby shoved aside the plate on which remnants of fried apple twisted around the bone of a chop, and set the cup in its place.

"You don't often take coffee," she said.

He stared at her fixedly. Finally the tip of his tongue moistened his lips. "That's so," he murmured. "But today I'm feeling awfully fit . . . Gaby, you ought to come to the pictures with me."

Gaby straightened up to laugh more comfortably. Her breasts distended her blouse and Lambourdin lowered his eyes. He drank his coffee in little hurried gulps, spent some time blotting his moist mustache, then folded his napkin and inserted it into his boxwood napkin ring.

"Good night, Monsieur Lambourdin," the cashier said without raising her head.

He was standing now, mechanically feeling the knot of his tie, the brim of his bowler. Gaby was scattering sawdust on the floor. She seemed naked under her dress.

"Not tonight," she said.

He went out, buttoned up his coat, scratched at a pimple that had begun to blossom on his neck, right above his collar. A nasty soft little rain made the street glisten; the red and blue lights of the movie house shone back from the pavement in zigzag flashes. Lambourdin consulted the program:

Gaumont Newsreel
The Snail in Burgundy,
documentary in color
The Killer Lives in Number 21

Nothing really interesting. Lambourdin did not care for crime pictures, and he'd been taken off snails because of his liver. Besides, the show had started and Lambourdin knew he'd get a bad seat, too near the screen and off to the side. He might as well go home.

Hugging the wall to keep dry, he started down the dark street, jumping when a raindrop splashed from the roof onto his bowler. Once again the weather forecast had lied. You really couldn't trust anybody. Everybody lied. Gaby lied. She kept promising; that's easy enough.

Lambourdin was passing a drug store with an imitation marble front. He stopped and regarded his reflection in the smooth stone. Not so bad, after all. A little on the short side, of course. A soft face. But a rather expressive mouth. The mustache made him look older. Mustache plus bowler hat equals white-collar worker. But

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what's wrong with that? It's respectable, being a white-collar worker. Madame Désiré Lambourdin . . . Some fine day she'd be glad enough, maybe, to be Madame Lambourdin.

He went on walking and turned the corner of the Rue Mocquechien. There were puddles in the broken pavement. Lambourdin took out his flashlight. From time to time he flashed it on the pavement and stepped across the puddles, groaning at the thought of his muddied shoes. Everything betrayed him. Treason was —

The man had appeared out of an alley. He bumped into Lambourdin, shoved him against the wall.

"You might say pardon me," Lambourdin grunted and switched on his light.

There was a sharp blow on his arm. The flashlight fell and went out. The man dashed off, slowed down at the corner, and took off again. Abruptly the sound of his running ceased. Lambourdin was panting, shaken by the encounter. The image of the unknown man was engraved on his retina like the bright shape of an object you've stared at too long: the stiff hair cut, Prussian-fashion; the wild blue eyes; the mustache tiny as a pencil stroke; and the cleft chin — an odd chin, shaped like an apricot. Lambourdin picked up his flashlight. It still worked. A good flash, given him by a customer who was liquidating American surplus. It cast a full, steady beam. He tried it in the night of the alley and jumped. There was somebody on the ground. People don't sleep in that position.

He took two steps forward and instinctively covered his light with his left hand, which began to glow softly like some strange blossom of blood. He was panting again, but differently this time. Fascinated, he let his hand slip from the light. Immediately he could see again the woman with the twisted face, with the widely gaping mouth — a deep hole surrounded by teeth. Then there was the skirt half torn off. Then there were the white yawning thighs.

He stuffed the flash into his pocket, still lit, and groped his way out. His breath whistled in his throat; he was thirsty and his legs were like sacks of meal. There was nobody in the street — only the rain and the street lights. Lambourdin took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead, his ears, his neck . . . Ow! that pimple — I eat too much meat . . . Yes. That was him all right. That was the vampire.

And it was then Lambourdin noticed that he had really not been afraid. A little of course at first, when the man had hit him. Lambourdin would have been really unhappy if, for instance, he'd been forced to surrender his pocketbook. But then when he understood, when he learned why the man's eyes were so pale, so distraught — no, he wasn't afraid then. Fear was something totally different, far more unpleasant.

Short, stiff hair — those eyes — the tiny mustache. Lambourdin

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walked with this shadow at his side, studied its details, criticized it. A ladies' man? Attractive to women? Not a doubt of it.

Carefully Lambourdin lifted the latch, climbed the stairs, and crossed the entrance hall. He spread his coat over a chair in the kitchen, took off his shoes, and lit the electric radiator to warm his legs a little. Nasty weather. Funny thing, bumping right into this character that all the papers were talking about, that the police were hunting for everywhere without even having his description. Lambourdin felt a shock. His description.

He put water to boil on the gas-ring, took a bottle of rum from the sideboard, dropped three lumps of sugar in a cup. If only I don't catch a cold . . . He hummed to himself as he fixed his grog. It's absurd, he thought. If they had any idea at the bank — Bah! He's not so terrible as all that, this vampire. If she hadn't resisted him — but always they resist.

He turned on the radio.

"News of France: The Council of Ministers has resolved that a monument shall be erected, in the Department of Creuse, to the memory of Ferdinand Chapuis, hero of the Resistance . . . The Boxing Federation has suspended Al Tenedo, Marseilles champion, for one month for his involvement in black market sugar deals . . . Investigation continues in the derailing of the Paris-Lille express. The switchman has been arrested . . . The police are apparently on the trail of The Vampire. Searches were under way this morning in several parts of the city . . ."

Lambourdin switched off the radio. He was not happy. Maybe he'd met a counterfeit Vampire, an imitator; the real one might even now be in jail. But the radio tells lies, too . . . My, that feels good, that hot grog . . . The police can't admit that they're groping in the dark. No. This was the genuine Vampire, all right. The idea was strong as straight alcohol: Lambourdin felt a little elevated, a little tight, as on the day he learned he'd been made chief assistant cashier. He undressed, rinsed his mouth, and used the three-faced mirror to locate that blasted pimple. He rubbed it with disinfectant salve. He hated pain; but he felt humiliated by this leering pustule, disgracing the white skin of his neck.

Before he turned out the light, he meditated a little more. Nothing was keeping him from telephoning the police; but instinctively he feared their brutality. Last year at the bank he'd seen a poor devil grilled by two sergeants over a wretched business of embezzlement. Brutes, rummaging in your conscience with their filthy, groping paws. It's my secret, Lambourdin thought, and I'm master of my own secret. Exactly — I'm my own master.

He chewed a mint before he went to sleep.

My own master . . .

The sunlight was young today — a tender, fresh light that rested on

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your shoulder like a friendly hand, that turned the buildings to gold, glistened like varnish on the chestnut leaves, and left a touch of joy on every face. There was pure pleasure in the cries of the newsboys: "The fifth victim! Get the latest news! The Vampire struck again last night!" People grinned as they bought the papers. That horrible Vampire — quite a thing to live with a Vampire lurking in the corner. Gives you ideas . . .

The barber shook Lambourdin's hand with unusual warmth. It was a long, strong clasp, expressing everything that the heart feels and cannot say.

"Well, Monsieur Lambourdin, you've seen about it? She was just twenty. Come to think of it, it happened near you. Maybe you knew her? Nice girl. Well-behaved, too. I did her hair only last week . . . Haircut, as usual? Yes, I'd like to know just what good the police are. We certainly aren't getting much protection. It must be a maniac. And you know what they discovered?" He leaned over and whispered in Lambourdin's ear. ". . . that's the truth, I swear it. Such a nice little girl. No, that shouldn't have happened to her. Well, I won't say she wasn't well built. Such a pair of . . . You want it cut well away from the ears, don't you? What a time we're living in! Now it's a Vampire. And nobody's seen him. Nobody knows what he looks like."

"Just a person. Like you or me," Lambourdin grunted.

The barber stepped back, his scissors clicking in space, and contemplated Lambourdin's head in the mirror. "No, Monsieur Lambourdin. There I must beg to differ. This is a Vampire, do you understand? A Vam . . . pire . . ."

"Bah!" said Lambourdin. "What's a Vampire? Just somebody whose passions are more violent than other people's."

"You're a philosopher," the barber murmured politely. "I can't take things like that. Now I was in the war. I've seen things. But if I was to meet up with a Vampire — I'd just pass out. Wouldn't you?"

Lambourdin closed his eyes. "I knew one once," he murmured.

The scissors stopped their clipping. The barber stared fixedly at the pale head resting on the white cloth.

"A long time ago," Lambourdin added hastily.

"Oh, well," said the barber. "Well, if you really want to know what I think, you're a queer one. Trim your mustache?"

"Yes. Cut it off. It's too long. I'd like just a suspicion of a mustache, you know what I mean?"

"*A l'Américaine?* You want to look younger, eh, Monsieur Lambourdin? Women love it that way. And it's very much in style, I'll have you know . . . There. Look at yourself. Ah, that changes you. A person would hardly recognize you. You'll be irresistible."

Lambourdin studied his face. Not bad. Not bad at all. He settled him-

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self in the chair, crossed his legs, and made an imperious gesture with one hand. "While you're at it," he said, "cut my hair short and stiff — you know, Prussian style."

When Lambourdin reached the bank, Firmin the doorman saluted him and then turned red. "But it's Monsieur Lambourdin! Think of that! I thought you were a stranger. Well, well, you've certainly changed."

The stenographers were so astonished they stopped talking. He passed through an impressive silence and entered his office. He rang for Gustave, his assistant.

"I'm not in to anyone. Understand?"

"Yes, sir," Gustave stammered.

Lambourdin changed his coat, examined himself in a pocket mirror, smiled at himself, and settled down to signing his mail. At ten o'clock he ate a roll and a piece of chocolate as he paced up and down his office. Pacing was a habit he never indulged in, but he felt a sudden need for movement. From time to time he rested his hand on his hair, enjoying the feel of the stiff, hard hairs, resilient as springs. He sat down again, shoved away the papers piled up before him, and took a clean white sheet from a drawer. His pen hung a moment in air, then began with a sweep:

My dear Inspector:
I know the murderer . . .

Which was true, after all. Lambourdin dropped the pen, overcome by the new sensation. There was a man in the city, a hunted man, and this letter would be enough to . . . I, Lambourdin, I possess this man. His life is like a copper coin that I toss in my hand. Heads . . . tails. Life . . . death. After fifteen years of service I, the 13,000-francs-a-month white-collar worker, I have the power of life and death. If I desired it, the man who makes all Paris tremble would come crawling to my feet. I am his judge and his God.

Lambourdin crumpled the paper and threw it in the wastebasket. He was unused to such lofty reflections; thoughts like that made him feel a trifle unwell. Only eleven o'clock. Well, what of it? Once doesn't make a habit. He grabbed his bowler, then turned and tossed it on a chair. No more need for the bowler.

"You're leaving already, Monsieur Lambourdin?" Firmin asked. "You aren't sick, are you?"

Lambourdin shrugged his shoulders and went down the stairs slowly, detachedly, like cabinet officers in the newsreels when leaving the Palais Bourbon.

Near the newspaper kiosk a little girl was selling flowers. Lambourdin bought a carnation, thrust it in his buttonhole, then chose a table on the Sidi-Brahim terrace.

"A Mandarin," he ordered.

People around him were discussing the Vampire. He felt a vague satisfaction in this, as though a relative of his had suddenly become famous.

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"Five hundred thousand francs reward to whoever helps capture him," an old gentleman grumbled.

Musicians in red uniforms, like animal trainers, were playing a melting air behind green plants. And supposing life was a jungle? Lambourdin dreamed. A beautiful jungle all a-tremble, where you devour your prey, where you stroll among flowers . . .

He paid his bill and sauntered to the restaurant. He was the first customer. Madame Mouffiat gave him her most business-like greeting and then, like the doorman, displayed a sudden disconcerted excitement.

"Gaby!" she called. "Gaby! Come look at Monsieur Lambourdin! Ah, what a surprise! You look wonderful, Monsieur Lambourdin."

Gaby made a face.

"You don't like me this way?" Lambourdin murmured.

"What a screwball you are!" Gaby said finally. "Why didn't you go on and buy yourself a pair of plus-fours? You'd look even crazier."

Nevertheless she seemed intimidated; her laughter was a trifle forced. She lost no time in serving Lambourdin.

"The menu," he grumbled.

"Oh, la, la! The table d'hôte isn't good enough for you! I suppose you've come into a fortune?"

He laid his hand over Gaby's. "Possibly I may," he whispered. "Now then, if I were rich, would you go to the pictures with me?"

She bridled, laughed again, but left her hand beneath his. "You, rich?"

"Me. And famous, even."

"Huh! Don't strain yourself!"

He smiled, nonchalantly brushed his fingers over his stiff hair. "I'll start in with the oysters," he said. "With a small glass of muscatel."

"He's crazy as a coot," Gaby murmured as she passed the cash register. "He says he's going to be rich and famous. Get a load of that!"

It was, as far as the little restaurant's resources allowed, quite a banquet that Lambourdin ordered. The regular customers stared at him with a trace of jealousy.

"Good Lord," said Casseron to his neighbor. "Look at him pitch into those frog's legs. Now I know banks. What they pay you, you can put in your ear. And there he goes eating up at least a thousand francs!"

And then Torche came in and attention focused on him; he always had a sensational tip or two, thanks to his cousin who was something at Paris-Presse. Gaby brought him his bread and he bestowed a friendly pat on her rump.

"What's new?" Gaby asked.

"Nothing much. Looks like Charrieras is going to resign."

"And the Vampire?"

Torche unbuttoned his collar and poured himself a large glass of wine. "The Vampire? He's done for. They've got his description."

"No!"

Forks hung in the air and thirty faces converged on Torche. He drank unhurriedly, rubbed the back of his

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hand across his mouth, then hung his coat on his chair. "Just what I said. He's through. My cousin got it from a police sergeant. Vampire, huh? He's just a poor dope that's cross-eyed and limps —"

"Do you believe that?" Lambourdin broke in.

"Sure I believe it. You don't think any normal man would go around committing crimes like that?"

Lambourdin was a trifle upset. It was hard for him to finish his cheese. "In my opinion," he answered, "it took something more than just anybody to kill all those women. Your story of this cripple just won't stand up."

"That's a good one!" Torche exclaimed. "When you do get around to pulling a gag —"

"What?"

"The cripple won't stand up!" Torche began to laugh helplessly, choking, turning purple, his eyes like shoe buttons.

Lambourdin put his napkin in its ring and set it on the table. "You're making a mistake to joke about it," he announced loudly. "He's killed five women, to be sure. But maybe he had his reasons. And you're forgetting that there are hundreds of people on his trail now. He's a clever one, I'll lay you anything. And he's no cross-eyed cripple who —"

"He *is* a cripple!" Torche had had enough; he was furious.

"Ridiculous," said Lambourdin. "I happen to be certain that he isn't."

"What do you know about it?" Torche yelled. "I suppose you've seen him? Well?"

Lambourdin all but lost control of himself. He closed his mouth, looked scornfully at the others, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Even if he was what they call a sadist," the other went on, "maybe there might be extenuating circumstances. But he robs them too. Like the one last night — he took everything she had on her."

Lambourdin admitted to himself that this was going too far. He wouldn't have thought it of his Vampire. No; this was not to his credit. Lambourdin ordered a brandy to give him time to study this fresh aspect of the problem.

"Shall I bring you the check?" asked Gaby. "Or should I put this little snack on your bill?"

They were watching him slyly.

"I'll pay now," he announced, emphasizing it a little. He took the bills out of his pocketbook and spread them before Gaby. Torche, seeing that no one was listening to him, began to eat. Everyone heard Lambourdin add, "Keep the change, child."

Gaby had turned crimson. Lambourdin rose, brushed the crumbs from his suit, carelessly lit a cigar and tossed away the match. "See you tonight, Gaby," he called over the heads of the patrons. They watched him pause in front of the restaurant, lift a beckoning hand, and get into a taxi.

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Torche had turned glum. Casseron leaned toward his neighbor: "Amazing how that fellow's changed!" And as Gaby passed him he caught her by the skirt. "Look, Lambourdin hasn't been playing the ponies, has he?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," said Gaby. "A screwball like him."

Lambourdin left the cab at the Tuileries and found a shaded bench. He tried to think things over, but he began to realize that already, almost unconsciously, he had made his decision. Impossible to backtrack now. He had to turn in the Vampire. A pity. Lambourdin felt a certain fondness for him. On the other hand, 500,000 francs . . . Maybe even more, if the Vampire took the notion to strangle another girl or two. At any rate, there was no hurry.

Lambourdin strolled along a shady walk. No one bothered to look at him. In a week everyone would recognize him. Lambourdin! You've seen his picture? The man who trapped the Vampire!

Lambourdin found a café and asked for writing paper. He had his words all prepared:

Don't waste your time hunting for a cripple. If I were in your shoes, I'd be looking for a young man with an appeal to women. If this hint is not enough, you will hear more from One Who Knows.

With his nail scissors he clipped the name of the café off the sheet, put the letter in a blank envelope, and addressed it to the police, Quai des Orfèvres. For a moment he could see the Vampire roaming through Paris, reassuring himself that he was still safe — and yet the trap was already laid.

Lambourdin thrust the letter in the mailbox. "Sorry, my friend," he thought. "If it wasn't for Gaby, I'd have left you in peace."

That evening Lambourdin reached the restaurant early. Gaby was setting the tables.

"I have the tickets," Lambourdin said, with perfect naturalness.

"But Monsieur Lambourdin —"

"Oh, come on. Just call me Désiré."

That evening Lambourdin ate calf's-head and rabbit, hunter style. "After all," he said to himself, "I'm not paying the bill." He was amused to think that the Vampire was helping him to conquer Gaby. "He owes me that much. I could have had him arrested today."

Gaby finally consented to go with him. "Just to make you happy," she kept saying scornfully. She thought the seats were too far from the screen; the smoke bothered her; no, don't touch me. Nevertheless, when the lights went out, he slipped his arm around Gaby's waist.

"Well?" he murmured. "Aren't we happy, the two of us? You aren't afraid of me? I'm going to spoil you, darling."

He tried to kiss her, but she turned her head.

"Come on, baby, be nice. I'm crazy about you, you know that."

"I have a boy friend already," Gaby stammered.

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"You've got the right to have another."

"It makes trouble that way . . . Stop it! Stop it or I'll scream!"

Lambourdin withdrew his hand, "I won't hurt you," he grumbled angrily. "I'm no sadist."

The people around them were stirring. "Shut up down there!" a voice yelled.

Gaby got up.

"Please stay," Lambourdin implored feverishly. "Don't push me too far. I might do . . . anything."

She slipped away and Lambourdin lost her instantly in the dark. He was trembling with rage and humiliation, but he was afraid to run after her, make people get up, confront the ticket taker . . . And besides, he'd paid for the seats. He'd fix her.

Lambourdin sat there.

Lambourdin brewed himself some camomile tea. It was no use. Sleep still eluded him obstinately. What should he decide about the Vampire? Turn him in? Give the police the full description, down to the apricot chin? But what was the point in that, now that the money wouldn't do him any good? Might as well leave him at large. There were too many girls in circulation — girls like that slut of a Gaby. One more, one less. Lambourdin dreamed for a moment, then tore off a sheet of paper and concentrated on writing:

You will never get the Vampire . . .

Lambourdin dreamed some more, then dozed off . . .

He awoke early the next morning, feeling as wretched as if he'd spent the night on a station bench. His rage had not abated; it twisted him like a stomach ache. He tried to drink a little coffee, but was forced to pour it down the wash-basin. Such good coffee, too. The pimple, thriving on his fever, thrust its aching head out of his neck. His mirror displayed three worn gray profiles with wildly rolling eyes. Maybe a bun, eaten leisurely under the trees . . . ?

The woman in the bakery was reading a paper. "He didn't kill anybody last night," she remarked.

"That's his mistake," Lambourdin grunted.

"Oh! You shouldn't talk like that. Suppose somebody heard you —"

"Well? What then? I guess I have the right to say that the Vampire is a benefactor of humanity . . . No fooling."

He paid for his bun, mailed his letter, and went off along the boulevard. The woman came out as far as her door to stare after him and shake her head. Lambourdin's shoulders were hunched forward; his mind was hard at work. How to get acquainted with Gaby's "boy friend"? Where to find him? Only one way: follow Gaby. The bun had an unpleasant aftertaste. Lambourdin threw it down a drain and waited for a bus. On the curb he turned over in his mind various projects for revenge, all of which proved, on fuller reflection, to be hardly practical. No; there wasn't any question. It had to involve the

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Vampire. Lambourdin had never before projected so many plans at once. He was awed by himself. He realized that he was capable, under the proper circumstances, of displaying brilliant qualities. Some day, he said to himself, I'll write up some of this. It isn't bad — not bad at all.

On the way to the restaurant he forced his face into unemotional lines. Telling Gaby off would be dangerous. Far better to maintain a dignified air, inevitably a trifle cold, but above all dignified. You want no part of me? But my poor child, I was paying you attentions out of pure benevolence — to take you out of all this. Let's not talk about it. That'd make a fool of her, that Gaby.

Gaby wasn't there.

"What did you do to her, Monsieur Lambourdin?" the cashier whispered. "She keeps on crying. Angèle's going to take her tables."

"I frightened her," Lambourdin said proudly.

"Well! Is that it? You're a funny one, Monsieur Lambourdin."

"You don't know the half of it," Lambourdin murmured with a wink.

He took his place, casting a lofty stare at Madame Mouffiat. She seemed ill at ease. They're all the same. All you need is a strong hand. Angèle did not even dare look at him. She served him with nervous haste. And the others too — the lunchtime riffraff, the Torches and Casserons, the 8000-franc ribbon clerks — kept their eyes turned away from him.

"A bottle of Vouvray, Angèle."

Angèle distractedly tried to insert the corkscrew upside down.

"Angèle, these peas aren't done."

"Very well, Monsieur." She dared say nothing else.

Lambourdin was ruining himself; but it was worth it to watch all those hungry wretches eating their meager meals. His peach Melba provoked a sort of speechless scandal, and Torche bristled like a dog confronted with a juicy bone.

"Well? How about the Vampire?" Lambourdin called out jovially.

The champing jaws were loud in the silence.

"There'll be some news soon," Torche growled.

Lambourdin grinned. "And how long have they been saying that?"

As on the day before, he made a majestic exit. At the end of the street he saw Gaby. She was taking advantage of the noon hour to visit her boy friend! That must be it! Lambourdin hurried after her. Gaby walked rapidly, never turning around, delightful in the blue suit that so exactly molded her body. Lambourdin had forgotten his plans, his projects, his resolves. He was unhappy and bursting with a violence that frightened him.

Gaby went into an apartment building on the corner of the boulevard. There was a cigar store and bar on the ground floor. Lambourdin bought a box of Gitanes and paused, uncertain how to go about learning what he wanted to know. Then he

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had the idea of consulting the mail boxes in the hall.

1st floor: Monsieur & Madame Clisson
2d floor: Monsieur & Madame Charrier
3d floor: Mademoiselle Marthe Bernard
4th floor: Madame Lagorsse
5th floor: Monsieur Georges Villenoir

That was the one. Georges Villenoir. It couldn't be anyone else in this building. Lambourdin went into the bar and ordered an anisette.

"What does he do, this Villenoir on the fifth?" he asked, as he sipped his liqueur.

The bartender reached under his cap to scratch himself.

"Villenoir? I think he's a painter. Why?"

"Oh, nothing. Just curious."

Lambourdin left without finishing his anisette. Base visions passed across his mind. A painter! She must be his model, of course. A girl built like that . . . And at this very moment she's undressing. He's looking at her. He's touching her . . . I beg your pardon.

He had bumped into a soldier who insulted him hoarsely. This can't go on. So much the worse for her. He sat down on a bench, buffeted by the exhausts of the flashing autos. His thoughts were tangled. His chest hurt. So much the worse for her. Impatiently he rose and drew nearer to the door.

When she came out, Lambourdin was there, leaning against the wall. She raised an elbow as if to protect herself, but he did not move. She wanted to run, he could see that. He simply followed her, disheartened, weary, a dull fire in his cheeks. She turned around from time to time, but she never slowed down. He finally gave up this idiotic pursuit and wandered at random along the sidewalks, sometimes stopping before a shop window, never thinking at all. He approached his bank mechanically, like a horse returning to its stall. He saw the doorman, turned the corner, and went on wandering until evening. He was waiting for the night . . . When the cars began to turn on their headlights he found his way to the restaurant again. He was sure that Gaby would return to her man. He would follow her, then they would have it out. He waited in a doorway, like a beggar. Gaby wasn't really bad. She'd understand.

She went past without seeing him. Lambourdin came out of his hiding place, saying over to himself the phrases that he would use. He felt deeply moved; she couldn't help but be touched . . .

The painter was waiting for Gaby in front of the cigar store. He pressed her against him; their heads touched. Lambourdin crossed the street calmly. It was almost deserted. There was only a Citroen parked by the sidewalk. Lambourdin looked to right and left, then went up to the couple. The man turned to him. Lambourdin

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recognized the stiff-cut hair, the blue eyes, the tiny mustache, the odd chin shaped like an apricot. He clenched his teeth and leaped forward as the shots rang out. He dropped to one knee, his arm stretched out to Gaby. The lights were spinning; the sidewalk came up at him and he heard his head ring against the pavement. Shadows spilled out of the Citroen. A flashlight blinded him.

"You recognize him, Mademoiselle?" somebody said.

"That's him all right," said Gaby. Her voice came from the end of the world; it was getting colder and colder.

"Get him in the car," murmured another far-off voice. "You're in luck; he was going to go for both of you."

"You're sure you aren't making a mistake?" somebody asked.

"No danger," one of the sergeants answered. "First of all he wrote to us. And then he made advances — didn't he, Mademoiselle? And all that money — we know where he stole it. The rat . . . Just look at that mug for a sadist!"

Again the flashlight full in the face.

"I think he's dead," the cop grinned. "No — what's that all over his cheeks? Why, if it isn't tears!"

"Coming, baby?" the painter whispered.

He vanished into the hallway with Gaby.

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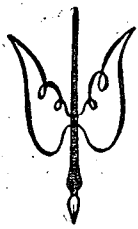

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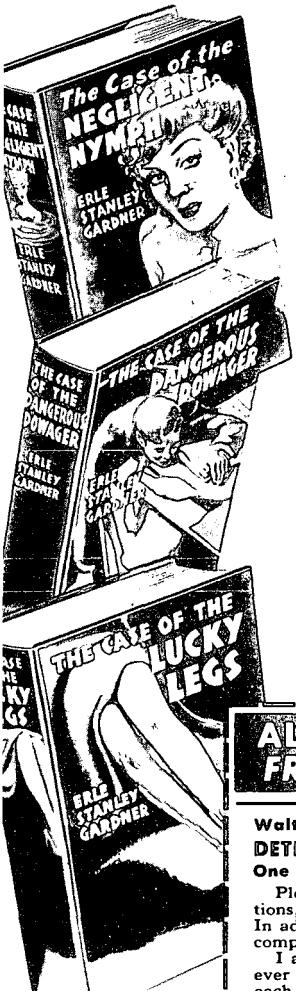
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